



Art by Maricopa County, Arizona counselor

Thinking too much make my head spin
In a situation where no matter what I can't win
Tears never fall no streams down my face
So used to Velcro can't even tie a shoe lace
I got bags under my eyes from the restless nights

read the rest of Big Vic's POW on page 17

Hello readers! This week is a kind of sort of double issue. All of 12.19 writings are featured and about half of 12.20 is in. Over the next few months, our publication will be hit and miss, given the demand on our time these days with fundraising and speaking to the very important workshops and the production of the publication. With that said, we know, given our time and who is on staff, that we will miss edits, workshops, etc. During this time we will be actively pursuing a solid volunteer base that will help us with the facilitating and production of The Beat Within. If you know anyone, send them our way!

A friendly reminder, given our current roster, The Beat publication will now only feature POW (Piece Of the Week), CoPOW, standouts and BWO (Beat WithOut) writings.

This editor and colleague Will Roy recently had an amazing adventure through Rochester, New York, spreading the word of The Beat Within. We encourage you to read the writings in The Beat Without section to learn more about our adventure to the Monroe Correctional Facility in Rochester, NY.

On another note our Beat Within colleagues were a part of a wonderful event, recently, at the Intersection for the Arts in the Mission District in San Francisco. Allow this editor to paste what our colleague, Michael Kroll, wrote for the group as to what transpired at this special reading ...

"Perry and I introduced The Beat and both read pieces to an audience of nearly 100 people. The response was overwhelming. A few people who already knew The Beat (for example, a woman who runs CASAS in SF that places at-risk youth into middle class homes) came up to tell us that we are doing some of the most important work being done in the City right now, and that she uses The Beat with every new training group she runs as a tool, a window into the world of the young people they will be housing. Most, however, had never heard of The Beat before, and they were blown away by what they heard. (As I told them in my introduction, nothing I — or anyone — could say about The Beat can come close to what is in The Beat, which was confirmed after we read perhaps a dozen different pieces, back-to-back, to overwhelming applause.)

After Perry and I read, three actors who work with the Intersection for the Arts did a performance of pieces they had chosen from our web site. (We did not coordinate this ahead of time, but coincidentally, one of the pieces I read was by the same writer as one of the pieces they chose to dramatize — Professor Blackmind — but we had chosen different pieces.)

We gave away Beats at the end, and asked for donations, and we took in nearly \$100 in donations! (Intersection for the Arts is also sending us a check for our participation, and their own response to the pieces we read was very encouraging.)

All in all, this was one of the most uplifting and fulfilling public events I've participated in for The Beat. (I'm convinced that our approach of a number of short, powerful pieces, was the right decision.)

Huge thanks go to Perry, not just for reading, but for embodying everything that is best about The Beat. I also want to thank our newest volunteer, Jabari, whose one-page description of what The Beat means to him captured the essence of The Beat. I read it by way of introducing The Beat to the audience. He joined Perry and me, so it was nice to be able to introduce him to the group, too."

All right readers, lets move on to this week's 12.19 topics followed by 12.20!

Our first topic, "Why Do You Do What You Do? (Explain And Keep It Beat Appropriate)"

The second topic, "Feeling Helpless..." - We know there are times while you're incarcerated where things are going on outside that disturb you but you can't do anything to help because you're incarcerated. That feeling is called feeling helpless. Let us know what makes you feel helpless while incarcerated and how you deal with that feeling?

The third topic, "The Pain And Pressure Of Being Misunderstood." Many of you in juvi write about how sometimes people don't understand you. When the hurt of being misunderstood comes to the pressure point for you, how do you deal with it? What do you do, who do you go to, for relief, to get back to normal, when people just don't take the time, or seem to care enough, to know who you really are? How are you misunderstood?

Lastly, "In This Day In Age My Personal Concern Is...." - We want to hear from you what is your personal concern at this point in time, or those that worried you when you were in the community.

The 12.20 topics, "A Big Hit" - In life, there are always remarkable and memorable moments — some beautiful and some terrible. What powerful experience could make you change the way you are, or how you view things in life? What can hit you so hard that it can make you want to say, "I'm over with this life. It's time to change."

Second topic, "Carelessness" - When has a simple act of carelessness caused tragedy in your life? Was it when you lost your house key at school? Or when you dropped something and it broke into a thousand pieces? Are there times when a simple act of carelessness could've caused a tragedy, but you got lucky somehow and it didn't? Describe the situation and how it turned out...

The third topic, "Calling Out To All Volunteers" - If you could write a promotional letter to people saying why they should volunteer at The Beat, what would you say? Would you tell them how much you need help? Would you describe how important it is for the world not to turn its back on you? We need volunteers and we want you to spark their interest. How are you going to do that?

Lastly, "Day Dreaming In My Room..."

All right, this fine issue goes out to the young homies over in Monroe Correctional Facility in Rochester, New York! This one is for you, sons and daughters!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Beat Within, a weekly newsletter of writing and art by incarcerated youth, is published by Pacific News Service.

At The Beat Within, we go through a lot of trouble to censor inappropriate sexual remarks, foul language, and gang references. There is enough tension in our communities already—we don't aim to bolster it. It is in The Beat's interest to promote peace and unity. Our goal is to educate one another.

The Beat Within publishes the opinions and views expressed by the participants in our workshops. This is simply the pure voice of the youth. The views you read do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher, editor or staff. All rights are reserved. Nothing from this publication can be reproduced without our written permission.

To our writers: What you write could be hazardous to you. Your words have consequences, and could be used to incriminate you. Try to illuminate your feelings and viewpoints without running the risk of providing ammunition for those who might use your words against you.

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Art: Much props to everyone for the great art this week.

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www.thebeatwithin.org

EDITOR'S NOTE	2
MONROE COUNTY JAIL	4
JULIA MORGAN	10
PIECES OF THE WEEK	11
CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK	18
STANDOUTS	26
SAN MATEO COUNTY	50
THE BEAT WITHOUT	52



Last week two very key factors in The Beat's scheme of things, David Inocencio and Will Roy, went to Rochester, N.Y. to collaborate with The New York State Literary Center's executive director, Dale Davis, and were blown away by the trip. (If you want to hear more about the trip, read the editor's note inside the cover.) They went to visit their county jails out there where they hold young men and women as young as sixteen. The people who determine whether they go to a juvenile or adult facility when fighting their cases are the arresting officers. Isn't that crazy? Well beneath all this craziness we met some outstanding souls who were more than willing to create what we hope is a long lasting relationship. Here are some of their great ideas, and as tribute to The Beat, the young people wrote on some of our old topics. Well, let us shut up and give the floor to them, if you want to see the young men and women we visited in the Monroe Correctional Facility (a minimum security prison), look in The Beat Without. This is a more detailed introduction by Dale Davis, a very amazing woman: "These contributions are from the Monroe County Jail and the Monroe Correctional Facility in Monroe County, New York. The writing resulted from Arts, Literacy, and The Classroom Community, an Empire State Partnership between The New York State Literary Center, Dale Davis, Executive Director, and The Rochester City School District's Youth and Justice Programs, Margaret Porter, Administrator, with the collaboration of the Monroe County Sheriff's Office. The Empire State Partnership was made possible with public funds from The New York State Council on The Arts." Let's give a warm welcome to our newest addition, the spectacular young men at Monroe County Jail.

What Is Writing?

When I was growing up,
I learned how to smoke and drink.
I learned how to smoke blunts and mix drinks.
I learned how to bag up weed and crack.
I learned how to load, carry, aim, and shoot a gun.
I learned how to cook.
I learned how to cut hair.
I learned how to survive in the streets.

I want to learn
how to select the right house in the right neighborhood
for my family and me.

I want to learn how to pay my bills.
I want to learn how to go grocery shopping monthly.
I want to learn how to be a good husband and father
and a role model for my family.

-Vernelle

Thoughts

When I was young,
I used to move backwards, not forward.
Now I am using my mind to move forward.

My thoughts take me to different places.
Thinking in a box
can keep you in a box.
Thinking out of the box
leads to greater experiences.

If you think of good things,
good things will come.
Think like you are smart, you will be smart.
Think like a fool, you will be a fool.

In jail I have a lot of time to think.
This time being in jail
lets me finally see I can use my mind
and this will be the greatest key in life for me.

If I thought about the stuff I did first,
instead of doing it,
I would have had a better outcome ,
a better view of life,
seen greater things,
done greater things.

In the streets, it's quick reflex,
hurry, hurry do what I have to do,
hurry make sure no one is looking.
In the streets, it's about
money, power, and respect.
The streets are a whole different game than thinking.

The streets can provide a lot of money,
but the streets can't save my life.

-Cameron



I Know Deep Down

During my time growing,
I learned how to know my wrongs and rights
and how to respect adults.
I learned the basics from my mom,
the stuff you need to know,
like go to school,
listen to your teacher,
do your work.

When I was going to school,
I knew my mom always told me to stay in school.
My mom wanted me to do positive things in life.
I came to jail the first time
for something I didn't do,
and now that I'm here it's hard time for me
because I know deep down
what my mom is going through at home without me.

-Quinton

How Can The Incarcerated Help Each Other

Some ways I can help those incarcerated with me are
if they are indigent inmates,
I can help them with personal and hygiene products.
Another way
is to tell new inmates the dos and the don'ts.

-Willie

What's God's Purpose For Me?

When I was growing up,
my mother took me to church and I learned about
God.

I learned how to sing and praise God.

When I first entered middle school,

I learned how to use profanity
and what I learned about myself
was how attracted I was to females.

I learned how to dress, act, and even talk mature
because I found
girls liked older guys.

Hanging out with my junior high pals,
I learned how to break into abandoned buildings on a
daily basis.

In the eighth grade,
I learned how to skip school for no apparent reason
just to be cool,
and to be a follower
not a leader.

Not going to school led me to juvenile group homes
and later
to live with my dad in New York City.

I would like to know
will my future be completely different
or does what happened in the past result in a present
future?

Another continuous thought I have is
does my father's absence play a big part in my juvenile
history.

Will it play a part when I am an adult?

My real question is
what is God's purpose for me?
Who will God send to speak to me and teach me?

-James

I Want People To Teach Me

In Puerto Rico

I used to help my mom cook,
pastille, rice with beans, chicken,
and do laundry.

My mom took me to school.

My brother and sisters taught me
how to throw eggs at the school bus,
how to play basketball,

how to drive go carts and ride horses.

We went to the river, rios.

We went to the beaches, San Juan, Bayamom, Arroyo,
Mayaguez, and Mumacao.

In Rochester

I learned to go to school,
to sell drugs, to skip school,
to go to my girl's house,
to be on the block.

Look where I am now,
in jail.

I want people to teach me how to stay out of trouble,
to show me how to get a job,
how to be a good example,
how to go to college.

-Juan

Thoughts

Thoughts
are a very important part
of life,
of decisions and actions
which lead to reactions.

We have the power to think about
whatever
we want to,
or want to do,
or feel.

Just one thought,
whether good or bad,
can change a person's mood instantly.

We might hear
I didn't think, don't think,
it all has to do with free will
and what plant we have soiled in our brains.

We can choose to plunk the plant
or let it grow to maximum length.

Sometimes
when the plant is a positive plant,
we kill the plant slowly with drugs and alcohol.

Sometimes
when the plant is a negative plant,
the drugs produce more negativity
that spreads throughout the brain.

In pursuit of our dreams
our thoughts are steady
and focused
on what we want to accomplish for ourselves.

-James

One Photo

If I had one photo,
it would be a family photo
that would show the family we used to be.
I would take it on a long journey
and keep it with me in jail.
The photo would keep me focused
while I am here.
I would pray over it night and day
and would place it in my bible.

-Cordarro

Most Of All, I Want To Know

First, there was learning how to fight,
learning how to hold a gun,
hanging on the block all day
trying to get money.
I learned how to rob to get it.

By the time I was thirteen
I learned how to take the weed that I smoked
and make it a source of income.
I learned about gangs.
Most of all I learned how to not care about shhh

I want to know how I'm going to die
and how that is going to feel.
I want to know what success feels like
and whether or not I will ever experience it.
I want to know how to take care of my family.
Most of all I want to know how it feels to care about life.

-Johnnie

In Search Of True Happiness

I'm alone . . .
 I'm cold . . .
 I wait for my name to be called for mail . . .
 but no call . . .
 I'm angry . . .
 I don't show it or talk it . . .
 but I'm angry . . .
 I try to make my cell like home,
 but it doesn't feel like home.
 There is no place like home.

Every night I pray that I dream of my family,
 but I have to face the wall every morning,
 my shore, where I'm at.

The way I feel about this place I just can't explain.
 I always say to myself, stay strong,
 and most of all stay true
 and never ever forget the fact that no one trusts you
 right down to the way they look at you.

Darkness and loneliness fill my cell
 with pain and fear too great to yell.
 As I wipe away the tears that nobody can see,
 I pray to God with my head raised above,
 saying please God show me love.

Now my eyes are open,
 now yes I see
 jail is not for me.

Darkness and loneliness fill my cell.

I wish I was at home with my family and friends,
 but I am not
 because of the choices I made in the streets.
 I used to say the sky is the limit.

Spring quarter and graduation were over.

Summer school had yet to begin,
 but my summer plans called me to an end.
 I was put in jail the next day
 because I was selling drugs.
 I was only seventeen seeing where the money could take
 me.

Now it put me back in,
 not knowing when I will see family and friends.
 And now at last it is all very clear to me
 that I will never see the world the same way again.

I am from the ghetto, born and raised.
 Mom said, "Don't leave the yard,"
 but I always wanted to see beyond the yard,
 be on the corner.

I grew up and went beyond,
 and I liked what was beyond the yard.

Then I met the streets
 and drugs
 and I was hooked twenty-four seven on the block.

Money, girls, clothes,
 and I always wondered why my mother said not to travel
 beyond the yard.

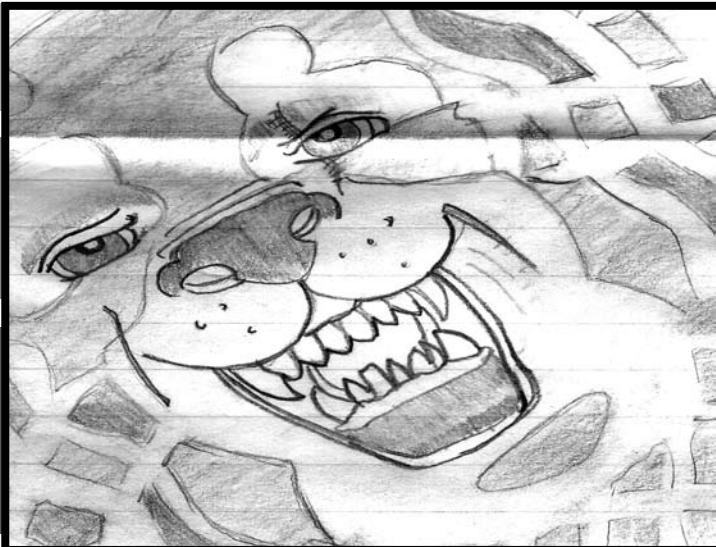
Then it all came to me,
 the world was coming to an end,
 people kill people.
 My mother did not want that to be me.

I spent many hours wandering through life
 with no real happiness,
 trying to fill my soul deep inside,
 drinking and smoking,
 and the next day it was there again.

This led to jail,
 to unfulfilled days
 that turned into forgotten weeks,
 to lost months
 that can never be recovered.

I am trying hard to find true happiness.

-Angel



One Photo

I would keep a photo of my wife.
 She makes me happy.
 I hold her so close.
 The photo would remind me I am going to be a dad.
 -Orlando

Gave Him The World

Life was hard.
 I saw nothing positive.
 Kids ran around crying
 with no family in sight,
 living in the gutter.
 Every day is a struggle
 for kids who don't know who they are
 or where they belong.

I was one of those kids.
 I learned to survive,
 every day survival,
 how to stay alive.
 I took care of myself and my brother.
 I ran the streets,
 robbed to feed us.
 I had to get us out of the foster homes we were in
 because of bad conditions.
 I had to get us living right.

The life I lived
 helped my brother
 become a straight A student.
 I gave him the world.

-Michael

How Can The Incarcerated Help Each Other

Angel talks to me when I get mad.
 Angel gave me food,
 and Josh did, too.
 They showed me they cared about me.
 We can help each other by caring about each other.
 When I was on Level One,
 they fed me,
 they helped me,
 they reached out to me.
 Angel and Josh treated me like I was a person.

I talk to Angel and Josh when they get mad.

Angel and Josh speak Spanish.
 I learned English in Rochester.
 I learned English in school,
 and I watched t.v. a lot, the news, cartoons, movies.
 I express myself better in Spanish.
 I speak to my mother in Spanish.
 My mother does not speak English.

I don't understand that much in English.
 It's hard.
 Sometimes when people talk,
 it's hard to understand.
 When I don't understand I get mad.

In school John helps me with my English.
 He helps me a lot.

It is hard not to understand what people are saying.
 It is hard not to know what people are talking about.

-Juan



Everyone Makes Mistakes

I would like to help people who are incarcerated.
 I want to let them know
 that just because they are here
 it is not the last step.
 Because they are here
 does not make them a bad person,
 just someone who was at the wrong place
 at the wrong time.
 Everyone makes mistakes.

-Andre

A Responsible Young Man

I learned how to go to school.
 I learned how to be a good kid,
 to play football, to respect my mom and my dad
 and my grandparents.
 I learned about the consequences of using drugs.
 I learned I shouldn't use them, and I didn't.
 I learned I'm a good kid
 who made a bad decision
 and landed in jail.

I want to know how to go to college,
 how to drive.

I want to know how to get my G.E.D.
 I want to know how to make good decisions.

I want to know
 how to control my anger,
 how to handle conflict without aggression.
 I'd like to know how to fix cars
 and how to sharpen my skills as a chef.
 I want to know how to take my interests and skills
 and make them useful in the work world.
 I want to know how to be a responsible young man.

-Philip

How Can The Incarcerated Help Each Other

We can help each other
 by giving each other
 good feedback.
 If someone is feeling down
 or going through hunger,
 we can help him out
 depending upon who the person is
 or what type of relationship we have with him.
 We can think
 if we were in his position
 would he do the same for us.
 We have to learn who a person is.

Personally,
 I am a fall back person.
 I observe
 everything in my surroundings
 and try not to communicate with a lot of people.

-Quinton

I Need To Know

I need to know
 why people act in such a way
 and when I get locked up,
 why do people stay away.

I need to know
 who are my friends
 and who will be there to the end.

I need to know
 when will I get out
 and be free to smell and see trees.

I need to know why I'm here
 and how did I get here.

I need to know where I'm going to be in five years.
 I need help.

-Angel

The Things I've Learned

It's crazy what I learned.
I learned how to roll up weed
and take the money I had
and turn it double or triple.

I was fourteen when I first rolled weed.
I learned how to take stuff that wasn't mine
and get away with it.
I was fourteen or fifteen when I learned it.

I learned how to talk to women
and get what I wanted.
At that point, women were objects.

I learned how to like to people.

I like to work with my hands,
I want to know how to start my own business.
I want to learn about the stock market.
Does anyone care?

I want to learn how to live safely.
I want to learn how to live on my own
and how to manage money.

-Cameron



One Photo

If I could only hold on to one photo
while on a long journey,
that photo would be of members of my family.

I would take the photo
so when I start missing my family
I could look at it.

I would take the photo
to remember

what my family members look like.
When I came home from the journey,
I would hang the photo up on my wall
to remember
the long journey.

-Kenneth



I'm Learning

I learned
Dad wasn't there
but I still respected him.
He was trying.

I learned
Mom couldn't control me,
but she was always there
when I was locked up.

In lock-up
I am learning to be mature
and to take care of my responsibilities.

I am learning to be a man at a young age.

-Arthur

Thoughts

Thoughts to me
are the nucleus or the world,
the main part.

Everything
we have today
came from a thought,
whether it was from God
or us,
it was a thought before it was created.

Thoughts
can help us
from willing one another coming back to jail.
If we think before we commit a crime,
we might not commit it.

Thoughts are powerful pieces of life.

-Tyshawyn

How Can The Incarcerated Help Each Other

Inmates help teach each other some things,
like they teach you how to make the gumbo.

They, also, show you
you have to stay on point.

Some
also tell and explain
that you don't always have to resort to fighting
or conflict.

I know, though, from being locked-up
for over two years in the past,
that you can't trust many, if any.

-Bernard

If I Had One Call To The Afterlife

If I had one call to the afterlife,
I would call my little cousin, Eddie
and I would tell him,

"It feels so good to speak to you.
I miss you so much.

I wish you never left us Eddie.
I wish it was me that went instead of you.
I think of all the good times, do you?
I pray for you all the time, do you hear me?
I'm glad you didn't turn out like me,
and I will see you in the afterlife.
Love."

-Angel

One Photo

If I could hold only one photo while on a long journey,
the only photo I would carry around
is a photo of my family,
my whole family
because if I am in a bad place
I depend upon them
to support me mentally and physically.

So if I was going away on a long journey to prison,
when I felt down
I would look at the photo
to remember the people who love me the most
and that way I will not do something stupid
that will make me spend more time away from my family.

I would carry the photo of my family
knowing they want me home faster.

-Leon



What I Learned Vs. What I Want To Know

What I learned when I was growing up
was how to bag up weed,
how to stand on the corner and make money.

I learned how to get fly.

I learned about dudes can hate you
when you start doing your thing.

I learned how to steal cars.

I learned how not to trust women.

I learned how to not care about my father.

I want to know what a million dollars a year is like.
I want to know how to start and run my own business.

I want to know

how it feels to not work for someone else.

I want to know how to have people work for me.

I want to learn how to build a car and take it apart.

I want to know what it feels like
to trust people I care about.

I want to know

why the system seems to work against me.

-OL



What I've Learned And What I Need To Know

I've learned what abandonment means.

I've also learned how separation
between two people you love separates your heart.

I've learned who to trust
and who not to.

And I've learned where I want to go is far.

And when I think about it deeper

I realize
I haven't learned anything.

I need to know who will be there for me
when I make it to the top.

I need to know
what will bring me to the best of my abilities.

I, also, need to know
where my life will lead.

And I need to know when I'll find out
because I'm sick of asking
why
and why not.

-Miguel

JULIA MORGAN SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Last week we went to an amazing school that's rented a space at Mills College in Oakland, CA. It was a middle school strictly for girls, so our newest treasure, colleague Jabari, and our consistently powerful veteran, Will were quite nervous preparing to speak, relate, and converse with a group of about twelve young women they never met. But to their surprise, they were blown away by how welcoming the young ladies were. They were like sponges soaking up every bit of information they had for them. And not only that, but the young women also amazed Jabari and Will with their incredible ideas and extremely mature way of expressing those ideas. They were definitely wise beyond their years. Hopefully they'll continue the relationship we've been grateful in sparking up with them. We'd also like to thank Jason for making all of this possible. He's their English teacher and from what we experienced any child, regardless what age they are, would be fortunate to have a teacher with as much genuine concern for them as Jason has. Thank you for making this happen and to the young ladies, you are true angels, we appreciate you for having us... Here are the results of the workshop we conducted with them.

A Song That Describes Me

If a song were to describe me it would have all the things that I care about. The lyrics have to represent those I love. The beat has to measure the anger that I have felt. The chorus is everything that I am.

If a song was to describe me the words have to touch me in every level. I would have to laugh when I hear it, I would have to cry. I would have to wish that it never ended.

If a song was to describe me it has to be a song that makes others believe in themselves. It has to make them dance. It has to make them sing along.

A song that's describes me well, it hasn't been written it hasn't been sung but I catch little bits of it in Mariah Carey's, "Hero," or Michael Jackson's, "I'll Be There," Dixie Chicks, "I'm Not Ready To Make Nice." Michael Bolton's, "Soul Provider," I catch a little bits of it in Aretha Franklin's, "Respect," I catch some of the words in Celine Dion's, "Because You Loved Me." I feel it in a song that described me well it hasn't been written it hasn't been sung because may be I'll be the one to write it and I will sing

-Kal

If I Could Write A Letter To Someone In Jail

I'd probably ask something stupid like how are you?
Or what's it like? I'm fully aware and knowing the answer.

An observer from the inside

I've always tried to write somebody on the inside.

But what do you say. How was your day?

Where you're going next summer?

Into the next cellblock — that's a bummer.

Or where are you right now?

Oh, you say the jails on lock down dang.

Or I could ask what's your favorite time of the day.

You said time stopped and the day just fades away.

Or, no I know the perfect question to ask

Some one I don't even know why are you there,

And why didn't I know.

You responded locked up and broken down you don't even know.

All that's relevant is this incarceration I could ask a billion questions,

I could say so many things,

You asked what I'd ask. I wouldn't ask one thing.

-Lucky Charms

24 Hours To Live

In 24 hours to live doctors recommend ten to sleep.

Ten hours with your eyes closed all alone.

Ten hours you could be laughing.

Ten hours you could be screaming whether sleep is solace or lost time. Why?

So in twenty-four hours to live:

Jumping and grinning

Yelling and running

Sweating and swearing

Living and dying

Why waste ten hours on sleep?

Become an insomniac.

What could you do in 24 hours to live?

-Chicken Of Nibelheim

The Story Of Sele Conceicao Damasceno

She was only twelve weeks old when she was sent to live with her uncles in America; they say it was because her father could not pay for her in Brazil. She ate too much they say. That's the reason they gave her when she was old enough to ask why, but she sensed there was something that they weren't telling her. Regardless of what they told her, she knew they were lying.

Her birth name was Conceicao Damasceno, though her uncles in America changed her name to Selé. She loved both of her names so she went by Selé Conceicao Damasceno. When she was in school that was the only name she responded to: Selé, not Conceicao, only Selé Conceicao Damasceno. Her full name.

She was small and wiry. Black, bushy curls covered her head and spread out all around her. She had tanned skin, though it wasn't as dark as she wanted it to be, so she spent lots of time in the sun, on the beaches in California. She had thick eyebrows, full lips, and black-coffee brown eyes. She was beautiful and she knew it.

She loves her uncles. And there was not a question as to if they loved her, and although their lives were full of hardships, she brought joy to them all. Not to say she didn't understand what was happening to the family at the time (the Damascenos where slowly but surely being robbed by the cousins in Portugal who the uncles had foolishly trusted with their bank account information but didn't know how to change) for she was hardly naïve to anything in her life, bad or good, especially not about her family, which she made sure she knew everything about. She knew there were things that her uncles in their old age needed but couldn't get; she just used her creativity and spirit to make her uncles laugh or smile whenever she wanted.

Selé Conceicao Damasceno was happier than most girls her age. She was rambunctious, outgoing, playful, a little bit of a troublemaker, and very, very smart. Her uncles were not actually her uncles, but were her father's uncles. They were aging and she was thriving. She knew they treasured her because she was their baby sister's, cutest son's daughter. The fact that she was the spitting image of her would-be beauty queen mother, who had died an obscured and tragic death, only made it easier for them to love her.

When she was four years and seventy-six days old, only Selé Conceicao Damasceno would count, she walked in front of a moving car, (or maybe it was a cat) and was paralyzed (or maybe wasn't). The doctors told her uncles she would never move again (or maybe they wouldn't) but, (according to her) she tried and tried until she could move. It took her another four years to regain movement of her whole body (or maybe it didn't). By the time she was ten, she could dance again, (which she had been doing since before she was born and maybe the whole time, depending on whether all this was actually true, but it doesn't matter now.)

When she was fourteen, she fell in love. This could have been the most dangerous year in another girl's life but not Selé Conceicao Damasceno.

You see, when she wanted something, she got it. When a person knows how to get what they want, this does not mean necessarily that they are spoiled; this just makes the person ambitious and obviously smart.

In Selé Conceicao Damasceno's case, she wanted Philly, a Dominican boy who she had glimpsed from the window when she should have been paying attention to learning how to do transformations in Math II. Selé Conceicao Damasceno then spent the rest of the day finding out everything she could about him.

Philly had dark brown skin, the color of coffee with then drops (yes, drops) of evaporated milk (it was cheaper) and two big spoonfuls of brown sugar, just the way she liked it in the morning. Long (for a boy), curly, black, hair framed his chiseled face and cut-boy-muscles covered his body, not bodybuilder huge, just cute-boy. He was tall and lean and she decided that he was going to be strong enough to pick her up the way the princesses were picked up by their princes in Selé Conceicao Damasceno dreams.

-Nina

Untitled

I hate watching life speed by and being too afraid to jump in and join the fray seeing everyone else. Fall and get up again going on unafraid of failure or anything else because they taught themselves to float in water filled with things to try to make you sink. I never had the courage to ever learn to swim.

-No Name

My First Time

I came into juvi for the first time yesterday. Thrown into a shower when it shut off before I got my clothes off.

Then a small courtroom. I shivered with clothes, hair and body on the cold hard square of cement I had to sit on. They take my things and take a picture there. And TB test me.

Next thing I know my dad's on the phone with me and my moms on too, they're telling me not to be sad and how I'll be out soon. That was over 24 hours ago.

How I remember being snatched away from home and my wonderful beautiful girlfriend. They cuffed me and sent me into the big black cop Durango without a good bye or anything. She probably thought I'd come right out after talking with the cops, well so did I.

I still haven't got my charges or any reason why I'm here and I feel so hopeless and helpless.

It's the first night in almost eight months when I couldn't tell my baby goodnight. When I couldn't cover up my brother as he's falling asleep before he hits the pillow couldn't hassle mom or dad couldn't do anything really, but cry. I did cry a lot. My eyes are red from crying. I'm sitting in this room seeing the other's pass by.

-Michael, Alameda

From The Beat: What a powerful piece you deliver on our topic of feeling helpless. You speak the honest truth of what your life was like the first twenty-four hours.



Pops

You raised me to be strong
Stayed by my side, even when I was wrong
I remember you watching over me
During them hospital days
Coming to see me late night

Praying for better days
I remember them times you caught me drugged out
Laid out on the bed, never kicked me out
Back track—years younger
Bringing me to Toys "R" Us

Always puttin' me on with all 'em neat stuff
Always giving me lessons on how to live life
Even gave me tips on getting a beautiful wife
I lost nine months with you that I can't get back

But this time I'm out; I got my mind on track
Them times you always told me to quit hanging out
I should of listened, 'cause now I know what family is all about

I should of took the right route, but now I'm full of regrets
I'll always love you, Pops

I'll never replace you, 'cause you're the best

-Frank, San Francisco

From The Beat: What a beautiful tribute to your father. How was he handling your being down at the Ranch? Did he come to visit you? You're already home by now, and we hope you and your father have been hanging together. Is he letting you get your life together your own way? We believe you when you write that you'll get your life back on track. What is your life like now? Touching piece.

...it's the first night in almost eight months when I couldn't tell my baby goodnight. When I couldn't cover up my brother as he's falling asleep before he hits the pillow...

Day Dreaming

Day dreaming in my room
for me all things are possible
for others there's nothing.

I think about a lot of things,
me in the Juvenile Detention Center.
The most my life has been is a pretty bad one
I'm in the room thinking
how I really messed up my life.

It's miserable,
me looking up at the ceiling wondering
why I'm so alone then I realize my life is over.
There's nothing I can do that can change the past
if I could just rewind life I'd restart my life over.

Then it hits me, if I didn't mess up
I wouldn't be daydreaming in my room.

-Kevin, Land Of Enchantment

From The Beat: Despite what you think Kevin, you are not alone and most of all know your life is NOT over. Your life has just begun. You're young enough to make a change in this world. Don't ever think other wise; you have talent in your words. Don't stop using them. The power of a voice whether it's on paper or by mouth is very powerful tool.

It's In My Blood

I'm like this 'cause this shhh is in my blood. It runs through my veins. I'm addicted to the action. I love the gun play. I done seen my brothers get shot, I want my revenge. I hurt my mom when I be creepin' through the streets. I hurt her when she comes and visits me. She looks in my eyes and says, "you runnin' the same path as yo' older brothers." She asks me to change, and I tell her I will, but I know and my loved ones know I'm gonna stay the same way.

Sorry Mom, this shhh is in my blood. I went too far to stop now. I seen too much, I heard too much, I lost too many homies. I just kiss my mom on the cheek to say good-bye and turn to the streets. She prays that I come home back alive.

One love to all, and a shout out to all my family. I love you Mom. RIP my homie Jimbo and my homie Gimp. I'm out.

-Baby Oso, Samta Clara

From The Beat: This piece is a heartbreaker, because it's so honest and well written and straight to the point, we know it's what you really believe. We do respect you for speaking the truth as you see it, for telling us what's on your mind. You have courage. But when you say "I seen too much, I heard too much," we have to come up and say the opposite. Have you seen the city where your mother was born? Have you seen the history of how Latin gangs first got started in the United States, and how they were connected to the ways Latin immigrants were treated when they first moved here, seeking a better life for their children? Have you read stories of ex-gang members who changed their mind for the sake of the people they loved - and STILL get respect from their old homies? You have made certain decisions based on what you know of a tiny slice of the world, just a few square miles, really, but until you take a step back from it, how will you know whether or not you're making the right decision. Worst of all, how will you know you're not just a pawn in someone else's big plan?

Helpless

A feeling of having no control, like a small child lost in a lightning storm, unable to find their way home. That pretty much sums up how I'm feeling at this moment in time. I wouldn't trip so much if the circumstances weren't so severe. The sentence aint nothing but the things on on the outs are.

My grandma was diagnosed with cancer before I went to rehab. She won't go on chemo, take treatment, or anything. I understand that chemo would make the amount of life she has left unpleasant and I wouldn't be able to bare seeing my grandma in so much pain. So I agree with her on that aspect.

She won't tell me, or anyone, how long the doctor said she has left. That's the reason why I left rehab. I only got to spend five days with her before I got locked up, but it was worth it just to see her smile. Now I'm going to be in here for forty-five days, plus who knows how much time in an in-patient. I would look at this as a vacation but not this time.

Time is short and precious, every second matters when they're numbered. Especially when it's with the person who never gave up on you, no matter what you would do, or where you went. She writes me and I got a picture of her today. She looks like she's fading. I just hope God will wait until I get home and show her the grand-daughter she always wanted, that I never was.

Well grandma, I love you always and forever and hope to see you soon. I'll try to stay strong and hold my head high, but it's hard when you know you're one and only grandma may die...

-Voodoo, Samta Clara

From The Beat: The piece you deliver to us is heart breaking. You hit the nail on the head with this topic. Helpless and guilt is what you feel. We can only hope that you will build off this experience and create a life free of incarceration and from this experience teach us, so less and less of us find ourselves in such horrible positions. What is the plan for you upon returning home?

Where Is God

No accident is ever planned
Thought the angel falling from God's hand
And darkness was the earth below
A place where nightmares do unfold...

Her wings they melted just like wax
Where they were, now there's blood
She sits in a puddle of her own tears
Her halo fell into the mud,
If all you knew was heaven
Could you survive in hell
Walk the world of shadows
Where demons choose to dwell?
She prays before the altars
And yet it does no good
Forsaken like she's never been
And never thought she would
She walks the earth in a weird trance
Regretting every day
How she ended up down here
Now she kneels again to pray
She wonders what type of God
Could keep her under His both feet,
How hath thou forsaken her?

How hath thou forsaken me?

-Lemmings U5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: There is a desperation about this very tight poem that worries us. Why do you think that God has forsaken you? Is God responsible for the situation you find yourself in? When you kneel to pray, what do you pray for? Do you ever imagine God is praying to you? What do you think He might want from you? Are you answering His prayers?

A Big Hit

I think I am a hardheaded teenager today because the way I did things when I was younger. I used to be so disobedient when I was younger. I always got into some type of trouble. It seemed like every day my father was on my ass. Even for things that I did not do.

I wasn't always like this. My father is a minister, and I always wanted to be a preacher. But it seems that now I am just too much of a sinner to be one. I think I could have changed my ways by just listening to my father. He always said I wouldn't make it in school. He always said I would end up in prison.

But I still can change that. I can change as soon as I get out of juvie. I am going to change when I get out. This is my first time being locked up and I plan it will be my last time being locked up. I plan on learning from my mistakes and plan on clearing my record and graduating from a good school and get a high paying job. My past life is a big hit. That's why I am going to change my past life. Juvie ain't no place for me.

-Jay U6, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Everyone's a sinner, Jay. Being a preacher does not mean you are without sin, but that you recognize the struggle that every human being has throughout life to do what is right, to help other human beings in need, and offer hope to yourself as well as others. Your father's predictions that you would never make it, or that you would end in prison may or may not come true (that's up to you), but the fact that he would make you feel this about yourself while still a child tells us that he, too, is in need of a preacher. Change is not something you make happen in an instant just be deciding to do it - just by saying "I'm going to change." Change is a process that begins with the desire to change, and you've already begun that process. But there are difficulties and obstacles ahead, so the important thing is to just keep putting one foot in front of the other, walking a path that leads away from the habits and actions that lead to places like this and towards a vision of yourself in the world that makes you proud to be who you are. If you fall, get up. If you sin, examine your heart and be remorseful. The journey to become what you want to become requires a plan, and you have already figured out that the foundation of that plan must be an education. School, and especially college, opens up doors of possibilities you don't yet know exist because you have not yet been exposed to them. Expose yourself to as many ideas and people and experiences as you can, while keeping yourself safe and free. You have much to give. Don't disappoint yourself.

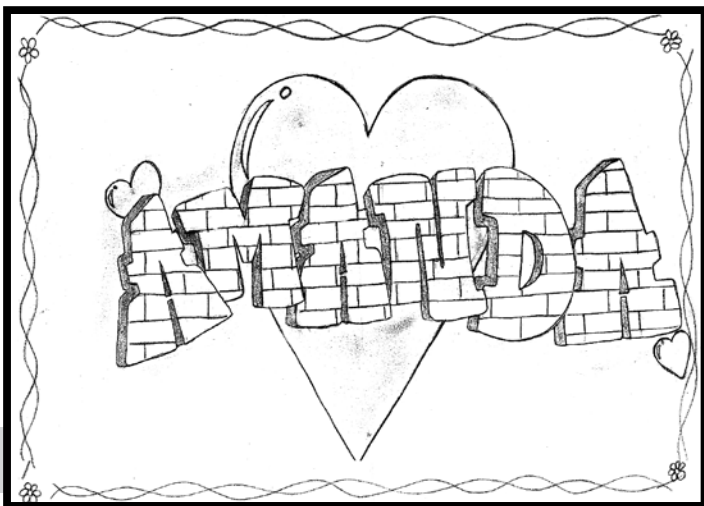
My Feelings

I am here because there is no refuge finally from myself until I confront myself. In the eyes and hearts of my mother, I am running. Until I suffer them to share my secret, I have no safety from them. Afraid to be known, I can know neither myself or another. I would be alone.

Where else in this common world I can I find such a mirror? Here together, I can at last appear clearly to myself, not as the giant of my dreams nor the dwarf of my fears, but as a person, a part of the whole. In this ground I can take root and grow, not alone as in death, but alive to myself and my mother.

-Young Hitters U5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We don't know exactly what "secret" you are hiding from (or hiding from others), but whatever it is, your openness and honesty, as expressed here, tells us much more about you than any secret you could possibly fear exposing. Yes, you are a part of something bigger than you, bigger than us, and you are already engaged in one of the most difficult — and most important — efforts that any of us can ever undertake, and that is to look at ourselves with a clear and unemotional mind in order to see ourselves for who we are. As the great Greek philosopher, Socrates said, while awaiting execution in his prison cell (more than 2,000 years ago): "The unexamined life is not worth living."



Being Misunderstood

When people haven't been locked up before, they don't know what it is like to be incarcerated. They have no idea. They say they know how you feel, but they really don't. They don't know how hard it is to wake up every day being in some place you really hate, wearing someone else's clothes.

When you first get locked up, you lose that fear inside of you of getting locked up. Once you reach this place, you realize that there are people here just like you and you are not alone. You only hear all the bad things about juvy from your parents.

It is a bad place to be, but you have programs and workshops that you can take to help your time go faster, to set you on the right track. This isn't the place that you want to be, but if you end up here, you should really listen to what your programs are telling you. This place isn't the life you want to live. Well, Beat, that all I have for today. I'm out.

-Jason, Santa Clara

From The Beat: We don't get many pieces in The Beat that acknowledge anything positive about juvenile hall, so we admire you for seeing what is available and taking advantage of everything that's offered. Of course, the ideal situation would be for these same programs, and more, to be available out there. But if you were free, would you choose to spend your time in these programs? An even better question is this: when you are free again, do you plan to seek out good programs and workshops (high school, community college, etc.) that can keep you moving on the right track?

My City, My Country

Young children having nightmares of death
From the horrific images my city manifests
The breathing ground of demonic spirits
Whispering words of destruction in the ear
Of a soul whose mind is weak enough to hear it
"This is my city. This is my country."

Human sacrifices are everyday gang initiations
The devil's armies are labeled with three letter abbreviations
Our jails are filled with our environments
Creations, secrets and lies are hidden beneath the surface

While money, sex and drugs continue to nurse us
The lives of loved ones snatched from this world
By today's epidemics, such as AIDS and cancer
A place where the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sins
And reveals Christ as the answer

But we turn our heads in a different direction
Seekin' an exit out of this world that's faster
"This is my city. This is my country"
The home of the most intelligent individuals to walk the earth

The very vicinity that Satan has cast his curse
A place where too many dead bodies are comforted
Inside the delicate cushioning of a hearse
"This is my city. This is my country."

There's no other place like it and there never will be
Police brutality is just our everyday reality
When will God save me, like He said he would?
Ever since I started to believe in Him, my life has been no good
Was Jesus a real person, or is he just a mirror image of myself?

'Cause I feel like stakes have been nailed through my hands
While people laugh and I scream for God to help
So much anger and hate that I locked inside my chest
I've kept so much inside me
It feels like they're snapping my bones apart and ripping through my flesh

I might as well be dead, but I don't want to die
It's just I can't get rid of this rage, it's like a beast
Striving to be released from his cage
That's just an average thought
In "My City In My Country."

-Zodiac, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Wow, Zodiac. Anyone who, first, can see some things so profoundly ("Was Jesus a real person, or is he just a mirror image of myself?") and, second, can create literature like this out of pain (sculpting it like clay) is very much alive, and should be celebrating that fact. No one can deal with your rage but you, and you have shown in your writing — and particularly with this amazing poem — that you have the tools to get control of the beast, and let it express itself on paper!

A Big Hit Right Now

Life as I know it will never be the same. At the age of 17 I had got pregnant and then I ended up in the D-home.

Life for me has changed. I have opened my beautiful blue eyes and realized that if I don't change then my daughter will get taken away from me.

I also realized if I don't change my ways I will end up in prison for a long time.

Reality finally came in and socked me in the face. Reality fell right on top of me like a brick wall and a falling tree.

I'm still sitting here waiting for the day I will be free and hopefully it's before my daughter is born. I hope to go home with my mother.

-Sara, Land Of Enchantment

From The Beat: It's not easy being a pregnant teen and you are correct if you don't change your life, as you know, it will never be the same. Don't think of yourself any more, think of this daughter you are going to bring into this world. Think of the life you want her to have. Make that change so your daughter doesn't have to know and visit her mother behind bars. Give your child real love!!

My Concern

What's most important too me is my familia. There always there for my good times, and bad times. My homeboys aint always there like they say they are. Not like my family is. You know I get visits almost every other day from my mama. I'm always hittin' her pad up just to see how she's doing and what not. Every time before we hang up she starts telling me how the familia ain't the same without me. How my lil bro been failing in school because he's so concerned. My lil sister's always askin' my mamas and pops when I'm getting' out. And mamas and pops stressin', can't even sleep...and when they do they have bad dreams about me making this a pattern in my life.

I'm facing two strikes. One slip and I'm out for the count. She tells me I'm always in her prayers day and night. You can say I'm a mama's boy, no doubt. I'm just concerned about hurting her so much. And all this bank she's payin for my dumb ass messing up.

Excuse my language but I just don't understand myself sometimes why do I keep coming back? I don't even know. I'm concerned about my pattern in and out of here, 'cause once you in I don't give a damn what you say, every one of you is coming back. Believe it or not you slip here but once you fall you're gonna continue to fall and that's that.

My family is getting affected each day by me wastin' my only life I live in this facility. Everyday that goes by is one more day I won't be with my family. That day's gone forever. I will never be able to bring that day back again. That's why when I get out I'm gonna get me a job, make me some skrilla to pay all my mama and pops debts back. Then I'm going back to school, not just for my own education but for my mama too. I promised her I will finish high school and go to college. I don't give a damn what people say, I made that promise to her and that's what I'mma do. Other than that I don't really care about Nothin'! Not even really for my homeboys. I mean they tell me they love me and they'll always have my back and shhh but screw that. It's all bullshh!

Where was the homeboys when I got jumped? I know if they was there with me they wont' go out like no wimps but the thang is they wasn't there. So they ain't always gonna have my back. Always sayin' this and that and shhh I mean keep it real y'all homeboys really can give a damn about me. Guess what I feel the same way bout y'all! Forget my homies it's just my mommas and the rest of my familia. I mean I have my ride or die baby girl. I'm havin' a kid with her real soon. Even though it's hella hard to find a lady like that, to tell you the truth I can care less about her. She hasn't written me once. I don't even care about my kid. I don't even know why my head tells me to love him. He's my kid! But I just don't care I follow my heart. Don't know I can't even explain why.

I ain't got much more to say so I'm gonna rap it up and dip. But before I do that just know what's real and what's fake. Know who's real and who's fake. I had to learn the hard way and my familia is what's real to me. Forget everyone else. And I'm out. Thanks Beat.

-Chango, Santa Clara

From The Beat: You spit your painful truth, and we're proud of you for that. Yet, you know the homies are not and will never be there for you like your family is. The time is now not to throw your freedom away, given you are a three strikes candidate. For your mama and your child to be, take the high road and live a life that will make her and all your family proud. You know you already have hurt her (and plenty of others) tremendously, so time to shine a little light on her, she deserves better as does yoru soon to be baby. Regardless of how you feel, you need to kick it up a notch and show some love to the child you are bringing into this world. The child needs a daddy, so wake up and smell the coffee, get your life right!

...look at James, he's gone for the rest of his life (in prison, no parole). He's never gonna be able to walk on the beach or at the park with his son even though I know he'll do anything in the world to do so...

My Last Words

Well, this got to be Oso saying my good-byes to all in this place. Well I've been writing in The Beat since the beginning of 2003 and it's 2007 now. Basically I grew up in here.

I'm not bragging about being in here. I say this so all the youngsters can recognize that being addicted to this place ain't no joke. It ain't nothing being here. Don't you vatos y hynas (guys and girls) realized that being here is killing un chingo de tiempo (a lot of time?)

If I would've never gotten wrapped up with the law, I could've been out right now, being the best father I can be, having a firme (tight) job. Instead, I'm in here, killing time. For what? Por nada (for nothing) because all the time I did in here didn't do shhh for me. I mean, it did so much that got boring.

One thing you people in here can do is to get your high school diploma. That's what I did now.

As soon as I get out, I'm going to college to get my degree as a pediatrician. My first six months there, I'm gonna be making \$33.00 dollars an hour. I'll be making more money than the staff in here.

Imagine when I'm there for maybe a year, how much do you think I'm gonna be getting paid? I mean, I'm not telling you homeboys and homegirls to change your whole life around, and to stop doing what your doing. Just do good for yourself especially to those who have kids.

I know for a fact that I want to give my son everything I never had. Think about that, look at James, he's gone for the rest of his life (in prison, no parole). He's never gonna be able to walk on the beach or at the park with his son even though I know he'll do anything in the world to do so.

Now we were taking everything for granted. Some of us in here have kids and don't care. Oh! But when your facing years, you finally realize that you have your kid(s) and that you want to be with him or her when you get out.

Don't get mad when your son or daughter is calling somebody else daddy or mommy. It's not their fault. It's your fault for not being there.

So what I'm trying to say to all you homeboy and homegirls is rise up! Because trust me, nobody in this world is gonna pick you up when you need that mano (hand) and that's on the serio (real)

Other than that I want to say thank you to The Beat and the staff here at the hall like Mr. Crockett, Mr. Hayes, Mr. Ruiz, Ms. McDaniel, Mr. Hawkins and Mr. Polk. There are more staff, but I'm not trying to name them all. I just wanted to thank you guys for all your support when I needed it. Thank you very much.

And to my baby Giggles take care. Well I'm done with this piece and hopefully this piece finds all of you in the best of health and spirits. Much love and respect.

-Lil' O, Santa Clara

From The Beat: We are glad that you're very positive Lil' Oso. We're so happy to hear you talking like this. If you keep your positive thoughts going, you'll be able to become whatever you want, and more. You will also be able to provide anything your child will need, a father, a good education, and support. You get out, get your education and raise your child with pride and love. Now, you have a diploma, a kid to take care of, and a lot of people who want the best for you. What's next bro'? College? A good career to provide your new family a stable life? Thank you for your advice and for trying to open the eyes of those who need a wake up call. Good job! Congratulations towards your new life!

I Do What I Do

I do what I do because I think I'm growing up quick. What I'm trying to say is that I used to be really good. I mean so good I didn't even know about drugs. I mean, I used to be a sport addict who was always playing football, basketball, and all of that.

Then we moved to the neighborhood I live in now which made me learned a lot. I learned about gangs, I learned about names of drugs, so I said, "cool I'm learning right."

Then I met a friend. I started chilling with him and everything. You know, like a best friend. What was cool about it was that he was at the same level I was.

I'm tryin' to say me and him were ankle deep in the game barely and that's another thing me and him started calling it the game. So we used the game to kind of explain knowledge street smart, educational smart, and all kinds of smart you could ever think of.

So him and I just kept on growing, really quick seeing things, hearing things, learning things everywhere we went. What I think is crazy is everything we have been through, we never asked to go through it or to see it -pretty much to live it. So I guess you can say we were about knee deep in the game by that time.

Later we've seen everything, we seen so much. Anything, people and those our ages had said was nothing new to us. I started thinking in my head, wow these kids are growing up slow, way slow, I mean I could see, hear notice that they weren't even in the game yet, even though they were the same age as me. I couldn't help myself, but to call them kids.

By now I'm young and a little older, and I have so much knowledge in my head that I started chilling with people three or four or even five years older than me. So now I couldn't even be with people my age. I just felt more mature. I guess. You can say I don't know how to explain it.

Now I'm fifteen and I know knowledge that twenty-five year old men were telling me like, "go to school, you won't get anywhere without it."

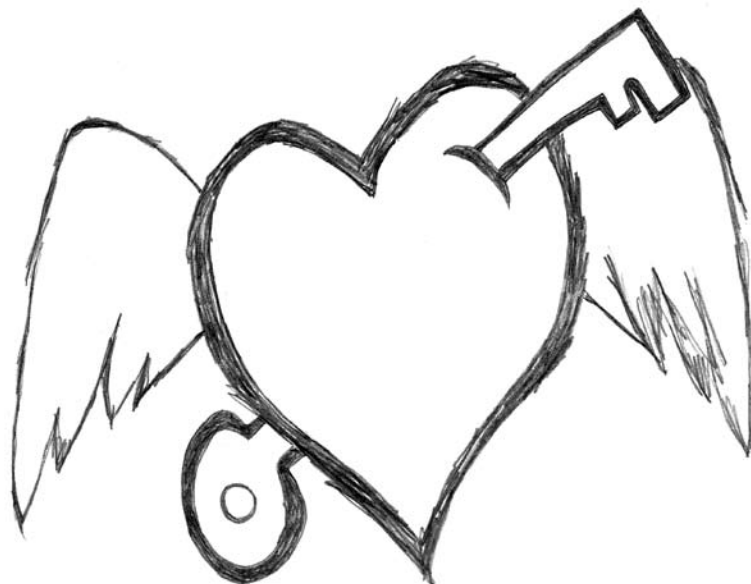
Yet, in the back of my head, that wasn't new to me for some reasons. I already knew that at a very young age, I was already tryin' to get a job. It's hard to understand what I'm trying to say, but to make a long story short, I'm deep in the game. I do what I do to learn. I'm fifteen, but I consider myself a man, because in my head, I understand the purpose of life to grow up happy with a nice wife.

Let your kids know the truth of life, I guess. Every grown up, tries to teach you that. But me I do what I do or better yet I am what I am. I am a man.

-Julio, Santa Clara

From The Beat: If you have the knowledge, why don't you use it? If you really think like a 25 years old man thinks, you should be able to make better decisions, know what's right and wrong, and have plans for your future once out of this place. Having good knowledge doesn't make you a man. To be a man, it requires a lot of responsibilities, to be mature, and to make wisely decisions too. Can you do that? If so, prove it with action not words. We think that it's time for you to stop the life you started years ago. What's next? We say the next step is to take responsibility and make yourself and your family proud. Forget the streets and the b-s game!

... the judge doesn't bother to
look inside of us. He just looks at the
paperwork and locks us up in rooms
full with hatred.



The System Isn't Fair

Tonight my biggest concern is how criminals, even innocent young people, are facing serious time. So many young teens are being sentenced to CYA. It's crazy how one little case can send someone there for years. The law is very tough these days. They send more and more kids there, knowing it's going to be hard to get through. Not just CYA, but other programs, like group homes, alternatives, etc. The judge assigns these programs and they're knowing that it is easy for someone to run and fail it.

Now these days it is easy even to catch a strike that would follow you for the rest of your life. This is my biggest concern, because all these situations are pending towards me. It's not easy to overcome this, but I'm trying my hardest to avoid and get the best deal. But the judge doesn't bother to look inside of us. He just looks at the paperwork and locks us up in rooms full with hatred. All he uses is his computer and pen and not his heart. So many people have lost important things in their lives because of this.

I don't think the game is fair. But, then, again, we also got to look at it as, "If you do the crime, you should handle the time." I'm sure everyone has heard of this phrase and taken the time to stop and think about it.

-Chucy, Samta Clara

From The Beat: We definitely agree with you that the system is not fair, which is why the only solution is not to get into it at all. Be careful you don't fall into the conditioning that says you deserve to be locked up because you did something against the law. Yes, we have heard the "do the crime, do the time" phrase a million times, and we hate it each time we hear it. Why is "time" the consequence that everyone thinks of? There are an infinite number of possible punishments for bad behavior, and taking time from your life is only one of them. We need people — especially smart young people like you who have keen minds and the ability to analyze — to think outside the limited ways we've all been conditioned to think. The system needs a new approach, but we're not holding our breath. So, you need a new approach to avoid it. What do you think?

Hurricane Katrina, The Big Hit

The first day I took the big hit was during Hurricane Katrina. It was hell, I felt there's nothing I could do and I can't change what's already done. I just felt miserable. My family and friends were all scattered around cities. President George Bush was on vacation when we got hit. The most devastating thing in my life was that day, when I lost my little sister to a thing called Hurricane Katrina.

-Kevin, Land Of Enchantment

From The Beat: It's not easy to lose a loved one no matter how old you are. The loss and devastation you have suffered is not something any one should go through; yet it happens. Hold your head up Kevin, be proud of who you are, and live for the loved one you have lost. Live to better your family, but most of all live to better your self.

What's Done Is Done

Being incarcerated has many disadvantages. One of the main is being helpless as to what goes on on the outside. Not only what happens, but you're helpless also in the sense that someone else has control over your life.

What's worse is even though you're completely changed and know you're never comin' back to this place, when you get to make that change, it isn't up to you. Someone else gets to decide when they think you're ready to return to society and make that change. Blame me for feeling helpless, but come on now, that person has spent a couple minutes in court with you each time you go in to see him. Now, I know The Beat's gonna tell me that, "Who was it that handed over control of their life? It was you."

Yeah, I know, but I think we'd know when we were ready to get back into the community. So, since there is not a single thing I can do about that now, because it's too late, guess I'm gonna have to just ride the helpless feeling out. It makes me pissed at myself for being dumb enough to just give the decision making over to someone else, but whatever. What's done is done, ain't no point in trippin' offa what can't be brought back.

All I got in here is time, time to think about all the changes to be made when I get out of here. You come to a point when you look at the walls in here and say to yourself, "There's gotta be more to life than these bricks and being told what to do." I've barely been in here and have already realized it.

There I was on the outs, thinkin' I was invincible and there's nothing that can stop me. I'm sixteen, I'm livin' it, lovin' it, and I ain't even been caught."

Well, here's a smack to my ignorance. Well, it's fine. When I get all this stuff done and I'm back where I belong, I'm doin' things a bit different. Get my bike license, get that motorcycle, a diploma, chill with my family and lady, get my job back, go to college and just do it right. I know all those in here reading it don't really care about my dreams and stuff, but I'm just trying not to give The Beat anything to say. You know how they always got that, "Everything you say in here is excellent, but we'd like to know what your plans are when you get out."

Well, I told you them. This place gets old real quick and you never get used to it. Forget juvy, I'll respond to my own thought. There is more to life than these bricks and being told what to do, and I intend on going after it. Thanks, Beat, for getting my thoughts on paper.

-Abu, Samta Clara

From The Beat: What a fine piece of writing this is, Abu. You not only wrote the piece, you also anticipated our "From The Beat" response, leaving us with little to add. (Aren't you happy!) We absolutely agree with you that those who exercise control over you only know a tiny bit about you, and are much less qualified to judge your readiness to move forward with your life than you yourself are. But if the decision were left up to each of you, do you think anyone would say they are not ready to leave this place — whether they think it or not? What would you think of a system that allowed your incarcerated peers to make that judgment, but not about their own cases, only about their fellow prisoners? In any case, like we said, you've left us no words of advice that you haven't already given yourself, so when you get out of this situation, you can always work here!

You come to a point when you look at the walls in here and say to yourself, "There's gotta be more to life than these bricks and being told what to do."

So Take It

The pain and pressure of being misunderstood
It's like being criticized for being loyal to your hood
you wake up being hateful

but not once do you thank God or be grateful
for the life that he gave you

But you worship the gun that gives the system
The power to enslave you
We need to face reality

Instead of walking the streets with a screwed up mentality
Every day we see poverty on the turf
Genocide puttin' dead friends on a shirt
Then you retaliate, but what's it worth?

You could never bring yo' ninja back to the earth
A lot of soldiers done fell victim to the block

Or to the system by gettin' knocked
And the judge givin' out time like he invented the clock
And the last thing you hear is the cell door shut and
locked

The whole judicial system I hate it
And the Uncle Toms in it that fake it
Life is hard, but there's a risk in every opportunity -- so
take it.

-Fat Wayne, Alameda

From The Beat: Man Wayne, you sure ran with this one. Great rhymes as always (love that one about the judge), so now we ask. Do you feel like during the time that you were out on the streets that you too were enslaved, mentally? If so, what is it that changed your life, that opened your eyes. A poem by you, that describes a before and after, would be pretty fantastic. As a writing exercise it might be hard, but to quote you "there's a risk in every opportunity, so take it."

Being Misunderstood

Sometimes people just don't understand me. They don't understand the things that have happened and what I have been through.

Sometimes they even say they do understand, but they don't. I ask them has it happened to you and they say, "No!"

When people look at me and they don't know me they judge me or they see a happy seventeen year old who's had a perfect life and that nothing has ever happened to me. If you look at me you will see the same. When I go out in public I put on a mask so no one will see my pain.

The Judge and the DA think I'm a bad kid because they don't understand me and I guess they're just not willing to understand what I've been through.

It's hard to hide, hide all my hurt and pain every day. I wish people could understand what I have been through so people could stop judging me.

-Sara, Land Of Enchantment

From The Beat: No, many people don't know what you have been through, and the Judge and the DA may think you're a bad kid, but keep in mind they are looking at things you've done, and to this point continue doing. Maybe it's time to take off that mask and start being you and not some one else. No one has a perfect life, and if any one tells you other wise they are the ones that have on the mask. Always remember you have two choices in life, a wrong choice, and a right choice. It's up to you to pull off that mask and decide what choice you want to make.



Love Is The Great Solution

Being misunderstood, I feel as if my PO misunderstands me, and the judge and the public defender. They don't know what I'm capable of, they just assume from past experiences, I can stay home and be happy, stay sober and go to school. They keep sending me away and I keep running away.

I just want to be with my loved ones. I hate having to run, just to be with them. I couldn't go home because of fear of the police catching me there, so I hopped around from place to place.

I miss being home—I haven't been there in months and months. It makes me sad to know that I have to be gone for a long time. The solution can't be found anywhere else, it's got to be found within. I know what the solution is—I just need love. Love is the great solution. Love is all there is.

-Trying To Find A Balance, Marin

From The Beat: You have your situation down pretty well. But, as you wrote, continually running from your groupers is self-defeating. You don't write about whatever mess created all this, but we wonder, are you in control of whatever brings you into juvy in the first place? So if you're finally free again, you can stay free? Remember, the judge can deny you another chance at a group home and sentence you to an out-of-state program, YA, etc. So if you get another chance in a group home, can you just do your program and go home to be with your family who loves you? We hope so. Be honest to yourself and to those who care for you!



Free Me

In this day in age my personal concern is my baby mama because she has my baby and I love my baby that's the only thing I worry about. While I'm locked up, I be thinking everyday and night is she feeding it or what up?

So when I get out I'm going to take care of my business and do what I have to do to raise my baby. That is by going to school and me getting a job, saving my money and one day buy me a house so we can live and not have to be with my mom all the time.

I'm tried of being locked up and my son growing up without a daddy that's not cool.

-Rob, Alameda

From The Beat: You deliver a very touching piece for us fathers out there. WE can so feel the position you are in. We hope it's more than words too. We hope you get home ASAP and give that baby all the lovin' it so deserves. We also hope you are serious about getting your learn on in the school house, getting a job, and saving your money to get your own home one day. Doing this will guarantee ultimate freedom from the criminal justice system.

Living On A Dream

Living on a dream, that I can't wake up from
Ain't never been known to listen, must of ruptured my ear drum

Born without a heart, got a empty space in my chest

My eyelids never shut, can't seem to get rest

Feelings in my life never have been there

Facing death head on, playing a game of truth or dare

Love that should exist has never been present

Complete silence about now would be so pleasant

Pictures on my wall they used to mean something

Now those people and these letters really mean nothing

Family say they care, but I don't use it like I'm blind

Try to be legit but I'm addicted to the grind

Thinking too much make my head spin

In a situation where no matter what I can't win

Tears never fall no streams down my face

So used to Velcro can't even tie a shoe lace

I got bags under my eyes from the restless nights

Got scars all over my body from the ruthless fights

Some wounds are hidden under the flesh of my skin

Praying to God every night to forgive me for my sins

The devil lures me with his calls and I fall for his trap

Get out but like a drug addict I always seem to relapse

No matter how loud I shout no one seems to hear me

Blow my vocal chords, I wish someone was near me

Push everyone away never tried to keep 'em close

And now I'm wondering why no one notices me like a ghost

The devil controls me my body's just a host

Thinking why I just couldn't be normal like most

Missing a part of my brain that let's me just host

Thinking why I just couldn't be normal like most?

Missing a part of my brain that let's me show no remorse

Controlled by a power, an undesirable force

Envy, hate, and rage only feelings I've ever known

Followed the bad guys 'cause the good was never shown

As a child I was never shown how to share

Called a greedy mutha but I didn't care

Never interested in my studies since grade school

Made money illegal but still considered a fool

The streets was home 'cause it kept me grounded

Hideouts left and right never to be founded

Too much to consume at times so I felt like I was drownin'

The main get at the circus so I kept on downin'

How can my life go straight when I have no vision

Only good at counting money, addition and division

Been told I'd be a failure since my birth

Government already has my place ready for me in the earth

I don't see it as a curse but more of a blessing

Like a homeless man eating all his food with dressing

'Cause in reality I can wake up from this dream

Or you call it life, but that's what it seems

Nightmares only last for as long as I want

So while I'm awake these dreams won't haunt.

-Big Vic, Alameda

From The Beat: What you've written here is truly, truly an important piece of literature. Wow. It's hard to articulate just how much you've captured in this, but we know you know because it's in you and you're carrying it around. Aside from the amazing writing though, we hope you talk to a counselor about the feelings you describe here, because it sounds like a heavy depression you're in and there are ways to work through it. You should know that as alone as you feel, there are millions of people in the world who understand exactly what you feel, because they feel it too. It doesn't help that you're in a depressing place in a sad and maddening situation, completely disconnected from your life and loved ones. You have reasons to feel the way you do, but it doesn't help and you deserve to feel better. Please talk to someone. We're pulling for you Vic! Stay in touch!

The solution can't be found anywhere else, it's got to be found within. I know what the solution is — I just need love. Love is the great solution. Love is all there is.

The Responsibilities of Fatherhood

I been locked up for about a month and two weeks. I have a little three-month-old daughter. I am fifteen years old, without any responsibilities but that one child. Sometimes I feel that it is too much pressure on my life, but as a young man that 's what I sometimes need to keep me focused. A lot of times I let other things draw my attention. Some of the things might be good, that's to the point where it distracts me because I get too excited.

Lately, I've got some bad news, saying that my baby mama is in jail. She went straight to Santa Rita jail. She is twenty-one with one child by me. She knows how old I am but it doesn't matter to her for some reason. I have a lot of family dead or in jail. My grandmother died when I was nine years old. My cousin is facing life in prison. My other brother is doing thirty-two years to life. My little sister and me are the only ones left. My only choice is to do right when I get out and to show a good example to my little sister and my child and going to do this by any means necessary.

-Steven, Alameda

From The Beat: You have a heavy weight to carry, Steven, because when you make that decision to change, for your girl, for your sister, for yourself, you will be the first in your family to stand up and say NO, WE DESERVE BETTER. And of course you do, and you have the strength to be the father you want to be, but it will take a great deal of will and struggle. Are you ready to meet the challenge? It will be easier, much easier, if you reach out and get support from one of the programs out there that is built to help young men in your situation. Ask your probation officer to put you in touch with some of these programs, and if he doesn't know any, let us know. In the meantime, we look forward to more of your writing... mature, thoughtful, fearless, in our pages.

Grim's Bad Day

What's up Beat. I wanna tell you a story of how I got shot in my right hip. I was on a job, I had to make some money to help out my mom one day. I was coming home from a check-cashing place when I ran into some ninjas who didn't like me. We got into a fight. After that I went walking home to drop off 200 dollars to my mom. After that I kept the other hundred dollars. I was with my cousin and my friends. We went walking to the store, when I heard a car stopping with screeching tires. I turned around and the ninjas hopped out and started to fight us. After about ten minutes they had lost the fight and hopped in the car and pulled out a 38mm revolver and aimed it at my homegirl, so I jumped in the way and got shot in the right hip.

We started to run and I couldn't run fast, and my leg was in a lot of pain. I seen a lot of blood and I knew I got hit. They started to drive off fast and these nice old people called the ambulance for me and I got rushed to the hospital. The doctors told me that two inches to the left I would have lost my leg, and they said one inch to the right I could have died because it would have hit my artery.

So when I got home I was happy and surprised and I went to the old people's house and thanked them. I couldn't walk for about four and a half months. Until this day I have the scars and sometimes still in pain. So now I watch myself more closely because you never know when y'all die. Well, that's all for now. 'Till pencil meets paper.

-Grim, Alameda

From The Beat: Yikes, Grim, this is the second hairbreadth escape you've told us about. And you write so well, and with such a natural sense of pace, that we feel like we're watching an action scene in a movie! But of course, it isn't a movie, is it, it's your real life, and you have this body that keeps fighting to stay alive, this heart that wants to pump blood, these muscles that want to stay healthy, yet because of who you spend your time with, where you go at night, and how you live, you are putting yourself in so much danger. These near death experiences aren't just to teach you about "watching yourself more closely".... this is about doing a FULL 180 on how you spend your time, who you spend it with...please, before it's too late.

A Big Hit At Eleven

I was only eleven when I had my big hit. I was walking down the street in front of my Uncle's crib. I was hit by a dune buggy driven by a 16 year old kid.

In and out of surgery then the coma I was in, when I woke up I was like a brand new kid. I had to learn how to walk and talk all over again. If anything changed my life this accident did.

-Johnny, Land Of Enchantment

From The Beat: Here at The Beat we're grateful you were able to recover from this sixteen year olds carelessness in driving a dune buggy. If you can overcome an obstacle such as this, you can over come any thing life throws at you.

The Being Misunderstood Topic

Q-vole Beaters. Well, this is Philly coming to you. Today I am choosing the being misunderstood topic. All I do is keep my head leveled and shoulders square, for I find it to be the best way.

In this childish place of incarceration, I feel that I am not understood by anybody. Whether it be my family, my rivals, staff, or even by my own kind. Nobody understands me and to be honest I like it. I do not act like people around me. I am myself and there is nobody like me, or vice versa.

I just want people to know that it's ok to be different. In my eyes, the gang bangin lifestyle itself is stereotyped as well as us gang members in particular. You see, the way I see it, why do people act like they can't stand each other when in reality, we have to respect each other in prison, at least the few who make it in prison? And back to the lifestyle of being stereotyped. Everybody views gang bangin as a negative thing. Why don't the homeboys realize that we need to get our heads out of our rear ends and start helping our people in a good way? That is what I don't understand!

One thing that I don't understand is, why do some Mexicans claim to be this or that, when they were born in our town, and some probably never ever been to Southern California (or wherever)? The only excuses I hear is that all that person's familia is in gangs, so it was passed down. I personally view that as being a follower. I view followers as weak because they need to be accepted. The weak get destroyed. Only the strong survive!!

As people read this I know some people will say childish comments about either me, or my piece. In my eyes, the people who speak negative about this are weak. Getting defensive? Those who talk need to say something to be heard, so they can try to show that they are "solid." And those are considered weak in my eyes because if you are a solid/righteous person, then you don't have to prove yourself because you know what you're all about. And to me that is what matters. And I consider that as a strong trademark.

To all who hate, run your mouths because deep down you're cowards and one who'll drop dimes in a minute. To all who agree with what I had to say and kept your mouths closed out of respect, then people, continue to be the righteous solid people you are. Much love and respect to all who read this piece. Take care and keep trucha.

-Philly, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Excellent commentary Philly. As to why one does what, well, you know it best, we all have choices to make, some do this and others do that. Remember many Mexicans do not join any gangs and go to school, work hard and enjoy their freedom, while others well, follow in the tradition of their hoods. And you? Given The Beat touches many lives, we're sure some will feel compelled to respond to your commentary. As for you, what was your reason to joining a gang? Was it family? Was it a best friend? A movie? A book?

Watery Eyes

Today I wake up
Out of bed
With you and my son on my mind
I woke myself up
with watery eyes

If you only knew
the way I felt when
I had that dream
Of my son dying
But worst of all
You wasn't by my side
It hurt to be in jail
And don't know what's
Going on with your child
Whether or not the baby father is still alive
It hurt to be sad
And no one to tell
you you're not
all alone
It hurts me
but does it hurt you?

-Mesh Mesh, Alameda

From The Beat: The heavy weight of being a parent, being responsible for another's well being, is even harder to bear when you're having to carry it alone. It would be so much easier if you had a fulltime father on hand to help, or if you were older and grown...what do you do to ease your hurt? What brings you hope? Who helps you with the baby? What are your strengths? We'd love to see a poem about how you keep going.

I wanna be clean and
sober and come in here
with that goal in mind.

This Ain't Right

This ain't right, being in here.
This ain't right, keep comin' in here.
This ain't right, what I am doing.
This ain't right, hurtin' my girlfriend.
This ain't right, hurtin' my mom.
This ain't right, hurtin' my family.
This ain't right, what I eat in here.
This ain't right, wearing these clothes.
This ain't right, what they're going to do with me.
This shhh just ain't right.

-Kizzer One U6, SF/YGC

From The Beat: What we really like about this is that you have balanced out your list of what "ain't right." You hold the institution at fault for treating you like it does, but you hold yourself at fault for hurting those you love. And you're right on both counts. The only advice we can give you is that if you take care of the things you have been doing that "ain't right," you won't have to worry about the things "they" have been doing. In other words, if you stop doing what you shouldn't be doing, then you won't be here to eat lousy food or wear other boys' clothes or worry about what they're going to do with you.

Feeling Helpless

I feel helpless when I can't leave with my mom or dad after visiting is done. I also feel helpless when I can't help my mom and dad with the groceries or when they need help. I feel helpless when I can't go home to my family and help them.

I feel helpless because I can't be there when my niece or nephew need help with their homework, or when they're hungry. That goes for my sisters and brothers, too. I feel helpless 'cause I'm locked up and not with my family.

-Marcelus U6, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Not only do you feel helpless because you can't do anything to help your family while you're locked up, think of how helpless your family feels because they can't help you! You're right that you need to think about your little niece and nephew and your siblings before you allow yourself to be taken away from them because they need you to model a decent life for them. But we also want you to think of how it feels to be a parent who can do nothing for his or her child but hope for better days. You owe it to them and to yourself to find a way to live your life without risking the precious freedom that allows you to help those you love — which should include yourself!

Day Dreaming

Day dreaming in my room...
I day dream of when I'ma get my life together.
Day dreaming...
Haven't you heard, birds of feathers flock together
Day dreaming...
Got all these feelings driving me crazy
I don't know how to feel no more
There is so much in life to live for that people don't realize
Day dreaming...
Bad memories come to my eyes
Day dreaming...
Wondering what's next in my life
Wishing I can turn back the hands of time
Thinking an' praying if anything can go right

-Lil Bipp U5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You're right, Lil' Bipp, there is so much to live for that you can't possibly realize at your age, because you haven't experienced what lies ahead yet. The only way to experience it, is to find a way to live day to day, so that you create your own life story. Wishing to turn back time (wouldn't it be nice) only helps you if it guides your choices in the future. We also wonder what's next in your life, but don't wait for it to happen. Decide what you want next in your life, and then make your plans to achieve it.

Why I Do What I Do

I think I do what I do because sometimes I feel hopeless, and if I'm not gone be able to accomplish what I want accomplished, then forget it! Where's the blunt at? Like now, for instance. I wanna be clean and sober and come in here with that goal in mind. I want to go home an ankle monitor, get to go to school (which I haven't been able to do in dumb-ass long), and hopefully get a job.

The thing is, I know I can conquer this goal of mine, but my PO is acting like he don't believe that I'm serious and wants to send my ass to San Jose for a year. Hearing that shhh makes a chick want to just give up and say to hell with it.

I'm trying to do good for the first time and be there for my lil' brother and still they can't do something I know will be positive for me? I'm not where I ought to be or even where I want to be; but thank God I'm not where I used to be.

-Maya U5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Here's the deal, Maya. Your success — your sobriety — does not depend on what you PO acts like or thinks like. It depends entirely on how you think and act. Don't think that you can conquer this problem by yourself, because that's a setup for failure, and you can and must succeed. Find the support of others who have been through what you're trying to conquer. In the meantime, don't let your frustrations become an excuse for using. Always remember that your life is not the photograph of today, but a moving picture that you are the director of. So, hang in there for that better tomorrow which almost certainly is coming your way.

In Need Of Help

Wassup Beat? I missed you guys just last week 'cause they had sent me to this group home in Sac. I wasn't feeling that group home at all. They straight up treated me like a dog at that grouper. They told me I couldn't brush my teeth only after three hours after I wake up. They gave me can food. They told me I can't get no body wash or shampoo until next week. They told me they can't help me with my problems. Basically, that group home didn't do nothing for me. There was no type if discipline or structure in there. Just yesterday a kid couldn't get a phone call to his mentally disabled mom, so he flashed and chased staff ready to attack them.

That group home wont benefit my stay and my life in any way. You know, I just did four months in the hall last week, waiting for my release to change to a bright future. But all I get is problems.

Now I'm back because of my own choice to return and look for a better place. I'll do these two weeks in here, but in the long run I'll get help. Tell you the truth, I feel scared going back to a free man with this big whole world around me. They keep sending me to these places, but they don't help me. Hopefully this time I'll get the right place. Honestly, I get more attention in here than I do on the outs

-Alex U3, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Well, clearly the group home they sent you to was not the right place for you (and, if what you've described is true, it sounds like the wrong place for everybody that's there...) It's a very sad comment that you get more attention when you're locked up than you do when you're on the outs! Your fear of returning to the world without the help you need is a sign of your maturity. So now you have to rely on that maturity to seek out the help you need. What would help you the most to stay out of trouble? Where can you find that help? What is keeping you from going to school every day and then coming home after school to do your homework? Wouldn't that keep you out of harm's way? Can The Beat help you in any way?

Why I Keep Coming Back

I do not understand what I do, for I don't do what I would like to do, but instead I do what I hate. Since what I do is what I don't want to do, this shows that I agree that the law is right. So I am not really the one who does this thing; rather, it is the sin that lives in me.

I know that good does not live in me — that is, in my human nature. For even though the desire to do good is in me, I am not able to do it. I don't do the good I want to do. Instead, I do the evil that I do not want to do. If I do what I don't want to do, this means I am no longer the one who does it. Instead, it is the sin that's lives in me.

“What an unhappy man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is taking me to death? Thanks to God, who does this through our lord Jesus Christ. So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. (Romans7,24-25)

-Marques U6, SF/YGC

From The Boat: The truth is, all of us are subject to the “sins of the flesh”, which is why we included that last line from Romans, which you left out. But are those the “sins” that bring you here? Does sin exist in isolation, separate from the sinner? The way you write this, it appears that you don’t believe you have any responsibility for your choices at all. In fact, you seem to deny that they are choices. We can’t accept that. We think you are still making conscious decisions that you know you should not be making. We believe that you want to be a good person (and we also believe you are a good person). We don’t believe you’re just the Devil’s tool. Like all of us, you have developed habits, and some of those habits keep bringing you back here. But you CAN give up bad habits, and replace them with good ones. That is much easier said than done, but it can be done. It might require forcing yourself in the beginning not to do what your head tells you not to do. But after several refusals to give in to temptation, you will find you are developing new habits that are much better for your future. And each time you exercise those new habits, it becomes easier, until ultimately it is just who you are.

Day Dreaming In My Room

Day dreaming in my room is all I do, thinking about my girl and my family and all the people that look up to me. Now I'm seventeen. I'm not a kid no more. I'm a young man with a young dream. But being in this place, I can't achieve my goals or meet my dream. If you're like me, then we have something in common.

But let me tell you something about life. Friends come and go but family will always be there. If you don't have a fam, then you might have a girl. But me, I have both. My girl loves me and I love her with all my heart. (The best things in life are worth waiting for.) It took me three and a half years to be with her, and now I don't want to waste this time I have with her because life is short, really it is.

I seen people die, but it's not the same when you lose that special person in your life. So now I tell you, when you get out of here, make sure you do go and live your life like if it was your last.

-Edwin U4. SF/YGC

From The Beat: As far as anyone knows, this is the **ONLY** life we have, so your advice to live it right is excellent advice. But since you know what is truly valuable in this life (family, loved ones), what are you going to change when you walk out of here so that you never have to walk back in?



Hopeless

I feel hopeless when I'm in Juvenile Hall because I feel like if something happens on the outs I feel like it's my fault.

I think if I was on the outs there would be a different result because I'm usually the one who wants to do something else. Since I stopped using all the drugs I used to use and all my patnas still do I'm the sober one that thinks about what we gonna do and what can happen.

Now that I'm in here and waitin' to go to Camp Sweeney I know something's gonna happen or someone writes me a letter I'm going to feel like shhh because I'm goin' to feel like I could of stop what happen even if I couldn't I would still feel like I could of stopped it. That's why I'm trying to change my life not all the way around but good enough to stop getting in trouble and since my lady having my baby I need to clean up my life to take care of my baby.

I'm gonna still be the same person but I'm gonna think more about what I'm doing and what can happen. That's why when I'm in here I feel hopeless and can't do nothing about what happen.

-Kilo, Alameda

From The Beat: It's refreshing to hear someone talk about the changes they want to make in such a realistic way. It's really hard to change, and definitely harder when we set unreachable goals for ourselves. Which isn't to say you shouldn't aim high for yourself—step by step is a good method.

Being Misunderstood

One look, they say, "You're bad! I know your type...
 One of them kids always using knives and pipes,
 Rollin' blunts, poppin' pills, doing what ever you feel!"
 When all we doing is keeping it real...
 Your friend needs help, so you cut today
 When you get caught, this is what they say:
 "You think you're sick, cutting's what you did
 You need to grow up, you stupid kid!"
 When you're in the office, your friend's getting beat
 They call your parents, you start feelin' the heat
 Stop chillin' with them! They do you no good!"
 When really, they're the ones helpin' you through your moods

-Curry Chicken U2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Isn't it interesting how people see the same things so differently. You have captured a lot of those different perspectives in this tight poem. When you say you're just keeping it real, does that mean you are NOT doing the things those adults think you're doing (from the weapons to the drugs), or does it mean that those things are not important measures of who you are? Is there a middle ground for these differing points of view, a way of keeping your friends who help you through your moods, but at the same time, are able to listen to what adults are telling them about crime and punishment? If adults misunderstand you and your friends, isn't it also true that you and your friends misunderstand adults? What suggestions do you have to bridge the miscommunications and misunderstandings between the young and the not-so-young?

Carelessness

I'm a careless person in many ways. I'm careless for the fact that I do stupid things to get locked up. I do shhh that ain't got to happen because I can turn my back and walk away. But no, I don't do it. I always put shhh on thick just to make my point. If I didn't try to make my point all the time, then maybe I wouldn't be here.

I'm careless 'cause my moms cares about me getting locked up and getting sent to the Ranch. But by me doing what I do, I am basically saying I don't have to care about what she thinks. My sisters need me at home to look after them, but I'm just saying "Forget them!" for getting locked up.

But I am not as careless now because I want to do what I need to do so that I can get back to the people who care about me the most. So I'm gonna holla at ya in a minute.

-Young Drew U2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We are always encouraged when we read a piece like this — acknowledging that self-centered and stubborn behavior has hurt the people you love, while committing yourself to change. But at the same time, we are not encouraged by the number of times we read this promise to change, only to see the young person back in the system! We completely believe that you are honestly and sincerely committed to changing your life. But we are worried that once you walk out that door, your long-term habits will kick back in, and you will find yourself back on the block with the homies doing what you promised yourself you would not be doing. That road ends in disaster. Now is the time to get off it, and to start walking a new road. With each new step, the road will be easier to walk, until you have put this place years behind you. Don't disappoint your family or yourself.

The Pain And Pressure

The pain and pressure of being misunderstood is heart broken nobody can understand my pain but me. I wish someone could really see me be me, but no they don't stop and listen instead they torture me in my miserable life; they say they want to make my life better, but it only gets worse. The pressure pushes you to do things you do not want to do, until you just can't take it. People are pushing you more and more they think it's easy but not for me, it's not. Why won't people just listen for a change? I'm so tired of being misunderstood.

Kevin, Land Of Enchantment

From The Beat: It's easy to misjudge a person wrongly, by that person's actions. If someone act's out of control or simply mean. People around them are going to judge that person by their actions, not by what they have to offer inside. Take a step back and think of all the positive you have to offer, think before you act, and make that change and you'll see life will get better.

Deafness: HEAR Me

When I'm being of deafness, a lot of misunderstood me 'cause it's not the word I'm looking for. They always say "I don't understand what you're saying." It's made me grumpy, 'cause every time they say that it makes me feel like they give up on me for trying.

I ain't givin' up, 'cause I always keep trying. I've always doing my home sign. Most people understand me 'cause I'm acting and make them know what I'm talking about, so much misunderstanding. And of course I've got lots of emotions: Angry, mad, sad, frustrated and disappointed. All of that cause them and me to misunderstand me and give up. But I'm going to have to learn to be patient with them. Nobody can be 100 % understood. What people can to say nobody's perfect? In this whole world and one planet, I'd say I label the world the misunderstood world - 'cause nobody's perfect.

People are trying to learn how to be able to communicate no matter what. They're trying, they are not going to give up on their words.

-Dizzy Birdman, Alameda

From The Beat: This piece has so much wisdom and pain in it, and also by the end, after you've explained what you go through as a deaf person, and how much of a struggle it is to make yourself understood, you also arrive at something that we all struggle with — how to communicate. We all try to reach out, to be heard. And we all feel like giving up when it seems like no one is listening. Your commitment to communication, to never giving up, is an inspiration for all of us.

My Feelings

When I was incarcerated in Colorado I felt helpless because my guardian would often get sick. My guardian getting sick breaks my heart and I don't know what to do most of the times. What makes me feel helpless is just knowing I was in a different state from her and the only contact I had with her is phone, and letter writing. That made me feel like it was my fault because I kept getting into trouble and getting my time extended. So what I tried to do to get my my mind right was draw, write and play volleyball.

Never was my mind right 'cause 24/7 I was worried about her, but at least I tried to get my mind right. I've been in the system since the age of twelve and the system finally hit me in 2004. I did something and got sentenced to YA alternative. I went to Colorado in "05" and I failed this year 4/03/07.

So it's all good. I got an easy sentence and I'll be out soon. But anyways, How I handled my feeling is negative. I was taking medication that was not mines, and cutting on myself. That made me feel good, but now that I think about it, that stuff was dumb. I'm over that now. I'm in my town and get to not only have contact through writing and phone calls, but I get to see her. She comes to visit me and I appreciate her and will get my act together.

June 2nd will be the big day and I will get my act together by going to school, not use drugs, or running the streets, and completing my EMP and Probation.

I will change because I don't ever want to be away from home, or get locked up again and feel helpless. Thanks for your time. Much love and respect. The homegirl.

-S, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Why do you suppose you kept getting into trouble, knowing that your actions would keep you away from your guardian? And you claim to be thinking of her 24/7? Well, what's up with the trouble? You weren't thinking of her at that moment when you fought, talked mess or whatever you did, right? We are glad you are in a better space, so make the best out of this chance and never come back into the grips of the system!

Going To School

What up, Beat? What y'all been up to? I might be getting out on the 25th of this month, and when I get out of this hell hole, I plan on doing the right thing by going to school. What I mean by going to school is being in class, not being a class clown, and doing my work. Not cutting class so I can't end up back in here.

And my other plan is to get a job and earn my money, not waiting on the block for it, not getting harassed by the police so they can't take my money because I'm tired of being harassed.

-P U3, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We are always encouraged when we read that someone locked up has decided to go to school and to treat school seriously. We believe that your education is the key to everything — staying free, getting a job, finding the right person to make a family with, everything! So we definitely want to encourage you to keep this promise. We know your life will change for the better if you do.

Dear Mama

Hey mom, I want you to know how much I care about you, even though I haven't been there for a while. I have been behind four walls. It ain't fun. I want to be with you mom, even though you didn't give birth to me. I love you no matter what.

My real mom wasn't there for me. I love her, but not as much as you. I love you and I'm goin' to do a program for you and me so we could be together again.

Much love, Beat. Peace.

-Sneeky U2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Besides being a very sweet tribute to the person who has raised you, you express something very important in this short piece. We often read pieces, especially by the boys, who think of themselves as "fathers" because they had sex with a girl who then had their baby. But as you make very clear here, "father" and "mother" are not based on biology alone, but on relationships. The woman you call mom was the mother in your life, so it is entirely right that your love goes to her. We hope that when the time comes, this will make you a better father, since you know that being there for your child is what it means to be a parent.

I want to be with you mom, even though you didn't give birth to me. I love you no matter what.

Just Another Number

I was silent at first. I had no one to talk to until a group of people came up and asked me if I wanted to kick it. That's when I started to call these people friends.

One day we decided to go on a ride, looking for trouble. We saw the 'enemy' and immediately took flight. We won and went to celebrate.

I heard a voice whispering to me. It told me I was riding with the wrong group of people — so called friends who didn't care if I lived or died. The only thing they cared about was another number in the gang.

-Michael, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: Too bad you didn't hear that voice sooner. Maybe you wouldn't be writing this piece from the hall. We hope you'll keep your ears open for that voice before you do something dumb again.

Pain

Pain is me

Why? I don't know

Pain is you

How? 'Cause it shows

Pain causes broken hearts

Are the beginning of a new start

Broken hearts obviously take time to heal

Pain makes you stronger

And this is how I feel

Pain built up

Turns into a black heart

And black hearts

Tear families apart

That's why I don't care for pain

Even though most likely I

I'll receive it again in this game.

-Clapa U2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: In the game or out of the game, pain is a part of life, so you will certainly be receiving it again. Only the dead feel no pain. And you're right that love (and its ups and downs) is a major cause of pain and heartbreak. (But love is also a major cause of joy and happiness!) If built-up pain leads to a black heart and families torn apart, then why allow your pain to build up? Besides drugs and alcohol, what do you do to lessen the pain you feel? How do you take yourself out of those black moods that we all get into from time to time?

My Destiny Is The Pen

Well, today I am going to write about cowards. That's all I am surrounded by this generation of younger kids in the hall who have no heart. They do the crime, then when it's time to do the time, they cry like little girls. On top of that, they let people punk them like it's the thing to do.

Well anyways, when they get here, all they want to do is go home and complain about this and that. Why choose this life style if you're gonna be a sucka and go out.

Well, I am 18 now and should be getting released any time soon. Well, I know what my destiny is and that's the pen. I try to deny it, but it's the truth. I know when I get out I am going to do the same things I used to. But "ef" it, that's the life style I choose and my next stop should be county. I'll see half of you there.

But on the other hand, when I get out I got some things to look forward to like being with my family and my lady. My lady says she wants to spend the rest of her life with me and loves me to death. But you know how that goes. We'll see how long it lasts. Maybe it does last forever. Who knows? I am just riding it out like a sav.

Stay up, stay safe and I'll see all the real G's in the pen. Gone!

-G, Santa Clara

From The Beat: This very sad sad! What's wrong with you? You have a lady who loves you and is willing to spend the rest of her life by your side, and a family who is waiting for you out there. What else do you want for your life? Have you imagine yourself in the position of any of those who are doing life in prison? What they do? What their regrets are? You don't have any idea of the things they go through everyday and night. Try a bunch of regret. Wake up man! Use this as a wake up call! Ring, ring, ring! Aren't you going to pick up? It's your call!

The Gang Or The Books

They say it's hard to be both a gang member and be on the books.

At first I didn't believe that. But now I do. I tried to go to school, and be straight, but gang related fools interfered, and now look where I am. For following the gangster way, I ended up at juvy. For going with the homies and busting a 211 and living that crazy life, I'm here. So — to those who have a choice — follow the books.

-Greeneyes, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: We're sorry you didn't take your own advice. We hope you get a second chance.

The Pain And Pressure Of Being Misunderstood

Hey Beat? How you all doing? Me, I am ok. Just waiting to find out if I am going to be able to get funding for my program!

Well, I am going to write about how it feels to be misunderstood. To me when I am misunderstood, it hurts me in a lot of ways because to me, it just makes me feel like nobody cares about me, or my feelings. And I don't like feeling like that. For example, my PO told me she didn't want me to go on my OT (Out Time) with my mom to go to my doctor's appointment. It was really pissing me off because I turned myself in and she just thought I was going to run. It didn't make any sense to me 'cause I took a big responsibility for me to turn myself in. So why would I be stupid to run on my OT?

When first I am pregnant and second I am done playing little kid games and I am going to be 18 soon. I am just doing my best to turn my life around and grow up. It took my PO a long time to realize that, but at first it was pissing me off. Because I felt like she didn't care. But now she's letting me, but it hurt me because I felt like turning myself in. Realizing that I am big enough and I am ready to change my life wasn't enough. Now my PO is willing to open up and now she understands where I am coming from. And I thank her for that.

But I just felt misunderstood for a min. Everything is going good, but I just hated that.

Well Beat, got to let you go but not for long. Late to all. Keep yo heads up.

-Shorty, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Good for you to be so mature in this situation. Your action, we bet, has spoken volumes to your PO too. See, over time she has truly come to understand how serious you are about leading a better life. Excellent!! Keep us posted, young friend, we wish you the best on the road to a better life.

Beat, I decided to stay straight and not mess up a great girl's life. I love my girl, Rayane, and I'll never hurt her again...

Why I Love Her So Much

I got locked up for some shhh I didn't do, and that's why my charges got dropped.

Anyways, I got locked up, and a couple days before, my lady found out I was cheating on her. At first she was shocked, and I know she was heartbroken. She hated me and didn't want to be with me anymore, but I guess she started to think about me, and now she realized that I wasn't acting like the man she fell in love with seven and a half months ago.

When I cheated on my girl, I wasn't thinkin' about her or her feelings at all. I was thinkin' about, what this other girl had to offer me. She paid for everything, gave me money when I asked, bought me clothes and pretty much jumped when I told her to jump. But, Beat, at the time, my head was full of crazy thoughts. I was doing things I would've never done, and the whole reason I was makin' all these dumb and unthought out decisions was because I was using at least two and a half grams of that finest AI sauce on a daily — you know what I'm talking about.

But, to make a long story short, me and my girl sat down and talked all our problems out and made a little pact that if I use drugs or if I go back to my old habits, she will not give me a third chance and leave me like that. So, Beat, I decided to stay straight and not mess up a great girl's life. I love my girl, Rayane, and I'll never hurt her again, and that's why I love her so much. Thank you, Mama. I love you with all my heart.

-Nate Dog, Santa Clara

From The Beat: It seems to us that you have cheated on your girlfriend, and you have cheated on yourself! You declared yourself to your one true love, two and a half ounces of love daily, and here you are. We congratulate you for being smart enough to make the decision to quit your destructive love and embrace that love that will keep you alive and thriving. But it will take more than just a talk and decision to make this happen. We hope that pride does not keep you from seeking the help of others, like support groups and doctors and, well, you know. When that stuff is available to you again, in freedom, and temptations all around you, having people who understand where you've been and how far you've come can be a real comfort.

This Woman

One day there was this woman, the most beautiful woman I've ever seen, and this woman loves me and my family.

This woman loves to take care of me and loves me. This woman cooks very very good, and she's there for me whatever I do, this woman helps me to make up with the girls I've disrespected and taught me to respect women with the utmost respect.

This woman taught me so much and I respect this woman. This woman is my mother.

-Ruben

From The Beat: What a great build up, to that knockdown of a last sentence. Your mother would be proud to see that you have offered her these beautiful thoughts... and of course the most important lesson a mother can teach her son is to respect himself. So for your next poem, tell us some of the things that you do to show you've learned the great lessons of self-respect.

It Hurts

Now, as I think about the pain
And pressure of being misunderstood
It hurts when I think about the things
That are bad and not good

The pain is like a bullet
Piercing my chest slowly
Thinkin' about God
And how He'll hold me

Right now I need all the love I can get
The people who care and love me, and that's it
Bless the unit and bless the hall
May everybody someday be
On the other side of these walls

-Mays

From The Beat: That's a beautiful prayer to end this poem with. Amen.

If You Don't Bang Don't Start

You know I been thinkin' about these so called gangbangers these days, who say they from this place and that place, but they really not, to me that be some soft shhh just to be noticed. But anyways I just want to express my gang life to those who don't bang.

The real life of gangbanging is different from TV, like my set I was raised in Southern California in Compton, and my father was an OG Crip and I always watched what went on at night around my house at night. On the real it was nothing but drug dealing, robbing, killings and when I turned 11 I took over. Ever since I've endured in the same activity as a young G, and to all who don't bang please don't start 'cause you will end up in jail, prison, dead, and if you lucky alive and out the game. So really trust me and don't start 'cause I've been stabbed, shot at, jump, all over a color and now I'm in jail because of banging, so please innocent youngstas keep society safe around you and DON'T GANGBANG. Peace out!

-Lil' Shoty, Alameda

From The Beat: What a plea you send out. You have stepped up to tell others to stay out of the fire, if they are not quite in it, and as for you, what does your dad, the OG, tell you? What do you want to do?

Feeling Helpless

There's times when I feel helpless and feel like a total mess.

All I want to do is get back up on my feet and make something of my life.

And hopefully one day become a mom or a wonderful beautiful wife

I want to show my brother and sister this isn't the life. In this life there is so much to gain, but at times all I feel is that the only thing I'm good for is to cause people pain.

There's times when I feel that everyone is against me When I feel that all I want to do is flee

Sitting here looking at these white walls just makes me want to fall

I know I need to be tough and keep my head up

I'm not the type to let my feelings show

But being in here I thought you might like to know Know how I feel

I want to make more of my life

I want to cause happiness and untangle this mess.

I have a family that loves me and wants me to do right

But at the same time I cause such a fight, and laying here, being lonely at night.

And fantasizing what my life could be if I would only be me

The me, who doesn't want to impress anyone

And if she wanted to she could soak up the sun

So here goes a fresh start and I mean this from the bottom of my heart

So let's hope and pray I make it far

-Debra, Land Of Enchantment

From the Beat: The only person that can show your loved ones you are truly ready for a change is you. It's easy to say I'm going to change when you're in the room with white walls, but the true test is when you're in the outs. Keep your head up and show every one you are ready for change.

A Drug Placement

I'm going to a place called Thunder Road because I be smoking, drinking, and thizzing too much. This placement has nothing to do wit' my charge, but I got a six to nine, which can go by really fast.

I'm going to turn sixteen in two months and be at a group home. I'm gonna have a new born and be at a group home. That shhh made me mad but it also made me happy.

I'm gonna take the first step into helping myself. A better mind frame for a unknown future is how I think of it. I have a strong mind and soul but I'm gonna have to let that soul and mind get damaged up a bit to learn and move on from my past mistakes.

I hope my roommate at the placement is cool and don't talk much. I like the silence feel me and you cool wit' me if you don't talk much (those are snitches who talk a lot) peep game.

I'm just trying to get this program and probation off my back, so I can be free.

There are people you divide, multiply, add, and subtract from your life. I have subtracted and divided a lot of the closest people to my life when I really should multiply and add them. Maybe this placement will help me add and multiply them into my life. All right Beat Within stay up.

-Immature, Alameda

From The Beat: The only person you can be mad at this time is you and you alone, as you know. You put yourself in such a predicament. We hope you take full advantage of this program and not get yourself into further trouble with drugs and crime. Do it for your child. What child wants a dope fiend for a father! Right! OK, use the program to do the right math so you have all the right cards in place once you touch down

Taking Advantage Of My Second Chance

Yo, it's Weapon. What's up with everybody? I can't wait to go home in two months. Time went by quick for me, but I've been working on myself since I ran from the Ranch. I'm really blessed to get this second chance at society. I could have been in YA, so I've been changing the whole five months since I've been here. I've been forcing myself to learn and listen to something in all my programs and classes I have. You can say you want to change, but actions speak louder than words. Everybody say they want to change, but ya ain't changing if you have one foot in and one foot out. This may sound like bs if you have not stepped out the box. I know there are better things in life than to be locked up, so I've decided to use my hustle on the positive side.

Since I've been here, I've been learning the white man's (the system's) game, so stop trying to make your own game up. Nobody cares about you but yourself. You have to respect yourself in order to love yourself and enjoy yourself.

I just hope I won't have any trouble once I get out. If I do, I would just have to tackle through it, because ain't nobody stopping me from getting to my goal, ya heard? LOL. (Laugh a lot.) I can't wait to give back to my community.

To all the haters: You ain't stopping me. I haven't caught no extra time, so I could go to college on time. Peace out, Beat.

-Weapon, San Francisco

From The Beat: You're doin' really well in your program. You seem to have learned a lot since you've been at the Ranch, and your gratitude for this extra chance is nice to read. You have lots of talents and you're right to develop them. And going to college may expose you to skills you didn't know you have, as well as a whole 'nother world beyond your neighborhood and the juvenile justice system.

I've only been in here for a few days, and it already seems like forever.

Feeling Helpless

Why do I do the things I do? Because I get angry easy in my past. my whole life. I never got to release my anger when I was younger because my father always kept me locked up. I never got locked up before in a real juvenile, but I was always was on restriction and in the house.

Now I am in juvie, and it's nothing like being on restriction at home. I miss my brother and my baby nephew and my sisters. I wish I could just change time. I wish I would have just listened and learned from my mistakes. I've only been in here for a few days, and it already seems like forever. I hate the fact that I am in here and can't see my mom and sisters and new baby nephew whenever.

I just want to be free, and it concerns me that I might be locked up and not get to hear his first words, or se his first steps. I also am concerned that when I do get out that I won't b able to get a job or get my own place.

I also don't want to be sent to a group home because I wanna be with my family. But my family right now doesn't trust me to go back home. Everything hurts me. Every time I think of those words, "You're blowing it," I feel hurt inside.

-Joseph 6, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We can feel how much you are hurting by reading this sad piece. Of course you want to go home, but you may just have to live through the consequences of whatever brought you here before that can happen. Why did your father keep you like a prisoner? Is he still in your life? Whatever you've done to lose the trust of your family can be undone, but that requires a strong commitment from you to make some changes. We don't know what those changes are, but you do! So, the question we have is for the long-run, which is this: Do you have the inner courage to make a change for the future? What will it take for you to find a way never to hand your freedom away again? When you figure that out — and carry it out — your family will see that you are again trustworthy, and they will again trust you. In the meantime, do as much as you can to prepare yourself for a decent future (like getting as much schooling as you can), keep your focus on the future — and try to let go of that imprisoning past!

The New Hall

They tryna act like we're in prison. Making us have visits behind a glass window. Like what was wrong wit' contact visiting in the old hall?

Plus, they feed us the nastiest food. It's not just nasty, it's a little bit of food. So eating this food we only have 2 choices: die from starving because the food is so disgusting or we can eat the food and die from high blood pressure because of the Sugar and Salt we have to put in our food just to give it a little flavor. And that shhh is still nasty!! My dog eats better than us. He eats fresh cooked bbq chicken legs. We eat 5-day old stale ass chicken legs with .99\$ store bootleg ass barbecue sauce. And with that we got dry ass left over lettuce for salad and fake ass corn bread that breaks into crumbs when you try to pick it up. I'm done, and again. Forget this county!

-Juan, Alameda

From The Beat: You deliver an amazingly descriptive piece. You make the reader taste the food with you, and we don't like it either. What role do you think our diets play in the way we feel and the lives we live, if any?

My dog eats better than us. He eats fresh cooked bbq chicken legs. We eat 5-day old stale ass chicken legs with .99\$ store bootleg ass barbecue sauce.

Change Is Hard, But...

For me to change, I would not have to hang around with the wrong group of friends that I have, and I would have to stop smoking them herbs, you feel me even though it is hella hard to stop smoking herbs. I would not like to be locked up looking at the wall or outside my little window all day, because that is just a waste of time of your life, making your family suffer in the outside, always thinking of their son, why did he do what he do to be locked up.

-Casper U4, SFYGC

From The Beat: Yes, it is hard to stop any habit, whether it's smoking herbs or hanging with the boys. But you are living with the hard consequences of those choices, so it's not a question of easy versus hard. It's a question of hard versus harder. You're smart enough to see just how hard things can be for your future (and for your family right now) if you don't make some of those difficult changes you know you have to make.

I Feel Helpless

I feel helpless when my girl writes me a letter, saying that she needs help with our baby daughter. When she tells me that, she cries a lot.

When my mom tells me things are going wrong, I feel helpless being in here, knowing I can't help them, and it hurts me.

When my uncle is giving a lot of crap to my grandma, it makes me helpless, because I can't be here to protect my grandma, I feel helpless.

When my girl says she is stressed out, I feel helpless. I wish I was there. I won't come back, so I could help when I'm out there. I love my baby daughter and am a be strong for her.

-Oscar, Marin

From The Beat: You're being very honest in this essay. It must be hard to put it out there how you can't help your family when you're locked up. Did you consider how your family relies on you before you messed up? When you're free again, will your family's need for you keep you from getting into other mess?

Dear Mom

Hey how you doing

I'm sorry for putting you through so much everything I did to you in past I regret

I swear I'm sorry

I never meant to put you through all this bull shh. If I can go back I would've stayed home like you and grandma wanted me to.

Now I'm stuck in this cold ass room wishing to be home.

I don't want to wait 'till visiting and court dates just to get a glimpse of you and the family.

I miss your hugs when you leave me at visiting.

I shed a tear writing this 'cause I miss you so much.

I sit here getting mad at you, telling you to leave me alone!

Now I just wanna hear your voice and see your face.

It's not going be like this when I come out.

I pretend to say goodnight to you and give you a kiss on the cheek and say I love you

like I always did before you went to bed

I rather be dead then here mom I love you and miss you I'm sorry for everything.

-Big Boi, Alameda

From The Beat: Your mom would be so moved to read this because you show real emotion and a connection that is so unique and precious. We hope you follow through and do things to show your mom how much she means to you when you get out.

Someone To Fix The Tears

Tracks are set in place, wheels rolling

Gears are let loose

Bodies tolling up the damage of use

Then it all comes down to abuse

No one cares

And you need someone to fix the tears

When you then fall harder than ever

And there's no easy way out

No lever to pull

You know you hit rock bottom

And need to get your wings back

And fly away with your life in one piece

Someone opened the locked door for me

And helped me see

I can turn it all around

And make it be

Something for me!

-Potter, Marin

From The Beat: You write like you've been through it. Why don't you write a piece for The Beat about the person who was kind and wise enough to help you when you were hitting rock bottom? Maybe you can write some advice, some inspiration for others who are feeling helpless and hopeless, from your own experiences.



Phony

What's up Beat? Too Militant here. Still ain't left but I'm 'bout to leave real soon. But my topic today is 'bout these soft-ass ninjas who wanna be hard and really not.

People come to jail by theyself, or sometimes with others, but try to make new friends by being hard. You ninjas come to jail sayin' that they bust they guns, get money, and got preal. But when staff check they personals, they ain't got no money, and in here for lil' petty charges that not 'bout murder or money. I'm just sayin' ninjas, they stealin' other ninjas' shadows.

Another thing is you ninjas not tryin' in to die or go to jail for life, you ninjas betta watch out tryin' to be something you not and get Swiss Cheesed up. But be yourself or no one else and stay solid. Stop jackin' my style because this kid is wild. I'm a militant-ass ninja on the loose again. I'm gone stay safe and solid.

-Too Militant

From The Beat: First, we want to give you props for being the only U4 writer to write enough of a standout to get published. Even when we don't agree with what you say, you always give us the benefits of your thinking and self-analysis, and we thank you for that. Second, we do agree with your assessment of a lot of the youngsters who come to the halls and think they need to front as tough guys in order to fit in with their peers, and it's too bad that they are not confident enough in who they are just to be themselves. But finally, we would rather read Too Militant writing about Too Militant — his plans for the future, his goals, his view of his life and where it's been and where it's going — than to read a lot about anyone else. We're most interested in reading just how a "militant-ass ninja" views himself.

Feeling Helpless

What's up Beat Within? My name is young T'MO, and ever since I been locked up, shhh been going bad. I lost one of my big homies, and I can't do nothing about it because I'm locked up. And now I feel like it's better for me to be in here because I would have been right there with him.

Another thing is that on Friday, April 13, 2007 was my court date. One of my friends got out and got bust at, and that's another reason I feel like I'm helpless, 'cause just imagine when I get out. Hopefully, I don't get bust at. That's why I feel helpless.

-Young T'MO

From The Beat: Since you did something to allow yourself to get locked up, it sounds like things were going bad before that time, and not just afterwards. There is no doubt that sometimes being locked up can protect you from the violence on the streets, but the problem is, you will be going right back to those same streets. So then it's up to you — and not just luck or hope — to stay out of those situations and away from those people that lead to gunplay, which leads to an early grave, a wheelchair or jail!

Jail

Man, jail make yo' ass go crazy. It for the right reasons, but at the same time it for the wrong reasons. Feel me, they trying to make you think about what you did by putting you in box with nothing in it, being away from your family and friends and shhh. In jail for a couple of months or even days make you irritated and frustrated, can't even walk nowhere.

Human being ain't made to be in jail. Got me caged up like a dumb animal. Don't get me wrong, jail work on some people. But most people get out, and in less than two years or so, they get right back in. Forget that!

Tear this motha down! That's how I feel.

-VP

From The Beat: We agree with you that cages are not fit for human habitation, and many people do go crazy inside such institutions. Just remember this, VP. The jail you're in now is a hundred times better than the state prison system that now cages 200,000 people, so you have to figure out a way to live without risking losing your freedom to that system! No matter how much you and others want it, they are never going to tear down these places (where so many make a living off of so many locked up), so that puts the responsibility on you to avoid them. That means not doing the things that have brought you here. Are you able (and willing) to make the kind of changes you know you must to stay out of jail? If you don't change, don't expect the consequences to change, either.

Rock To My Beat!

Homies in the halls and homies on the street
Everybody come around, rock to my beat
Fourth time in here, been in about a week
Sleeping with small holy covers
And the sheets smell like pee
I pray I get out, but I might stay in
But when I get out, I ain't coming back again.

-Mike

From The Beat: We love how you've made this rhyme/But why should things be different this time?/You say that this will be your last/But haven't you also said that in the past?/We've read similar promises in all our Beats/Yet, the writers return to sleep on pee-stained sheets/The formula is simple: Do the same as before/And expect the same consequence, only more/But if your desire to stay out is true and strong/You can — and we hope you do — prove us wrong!

I'm Doin' What I do

The fam bam always be askin' me why I do the thing I do
I shrug my shoulders to 'em, but in my head I'm sayin',
"Only if y'all knew."

Really, I doin' what I do because I'm out here feelin' like I could

Out here gettin' money, man I'm eatin', bruh I'm good
Neva a ninja hungry, I stay with money in my pocket
Can't tell y'all how I get it, but just know that a ninja got it
Doin' what I do is makin' a young ninja rich
I'll still be out there broke if I neva did the things I did

-Savioso

From The Beat: We've got bad news for you, Savioso: You're not out there at all! You say you're out there getting money, but not a word about how that leads you to where you are right now! Are you blind? Are you living in denial? Where you are now, you're not even allowed to touch money! And (we hope you believe us), it only gets worse from here on! If you think you can continue getting money the way you've been getting it without having to live the life of a slave that you're now living, then you're deluding yourself. Open your eyes and look around you. This is the reality you have chosen for yourself. You're making somebody rich, all right, but it isn't you!

A Honduran Hurricane

In the year 1999, there was a hurricane in the city of Tegucigalpa. The people ran and screamed, and the women and children died. Some of my family members lost their houses. The river that was in Tegucigalpa grew, and the river dragged cars away. At that time I was young. I don't remember exactly what happened, but I know it was difficult for the people because they lost their houses and families, and I don't want that to ever happen again.

-Marlo

From The Beat: Natural disasters, like hurricanes and floods, can be very terrifying and devastating. We hope you never have to experience anything like this again!

No Place For Kids

What's good, Beat? Dis Young Domo. I just want y'all to know that where I'm at y'all don't want to come here. Dis is not a place for kids that want to do something with they life.. Ninjas think they sick for comin' to da halls, but ain't shhh sick about bein' locked up.

But you k now when I get out, a am do my best not t come back, but you know shhh happen. You ninjas be cool. I'm out.

-Domo

From The Beat: We agree with you that the halls are not the place for anyone who wants to make something of their life. But saying "shhh happens" is not enough to keep you out. Yes, things do happen that we have no control over sometimes. But too many times, shhh happens because of who we are with and what we are doing. We think it's time for you to take some responsibility for your own choices, and to retake control of your life!

Helplessness:

To That Special Someone, My Princess
 I hella miss you
 Now your outta my view
 Sorry I can't be there
 That's so unfair
 I want to be there for you
 You're so special out of a few
 Sorry I can't be there
 That's so unfair
 I hella miss your looks
 I see your face in my books
 Sorry I can't be true
 That's so unfair
 I miss your personality h
 Hope you not angry at me
 You sending me letters
 Saying you're sadder than ever
 Sorry I can't be there
 That's so unfair

-Chinatown Kangaroo

From The Beat: We love how you constructed this poem, CK, with the repeated phrase, "That's so unfair." Whether she's angry at you or not, we wonder if you're angry at yourself for allowing the system to take you away from someone so special in your life. And, of course, we wonder what you're going to change — what you're willing to stop doing — when you get out of here so you won't have to write any more sad poems like this.

Everything That I Been Doing Is All-Bad!!

Apparently, it's all-bad right now. I'm in this facility feelin' all bad right now. I miss my boo so much and my family. I also miss my phone. I wish I could be at home right now talking up a storm and sitting in front of my computer on My Space.

April was a bad-luck month for me. I got locked up and my boy friend racked his nice scrap and lost his phone. Then my other friend got locked up because he was running from being chased by the police, hit a man, split his body in half and tried to get out the car and run. He got caught. Now he 'bout to spend LIFE in jail!

I'm also feelin' bad because I missed my dad's B-Day, and I just been missing out on life, especially my schooling. Man, this next couple of months is going to be hard to bounce back to the glamorous life I used live.

Man, I'm locked up again I'm going through rough times. I wish I was back in my 'je'ts so I can be on my hard grind. I'm Gone

-Glamma Chick

From The Beat: If you're on the "hard grind" in the 'je'ts when you're not locked up, then we don't think your current problems have much to do with bad luck. In fact, we don't think luck has anything to do with it. We hate those three words, "locked up again" and we wonder when you will hate those words enough to figure out a way not to have to say them, meaning a way not to have to come back to jail! We're sorry your friend is about to go to jail for life (we assume he killed the man he hit), but there's nothing you can do about that. You can only do something about your own choices. If you keep making the same ones you've been making, you'll end up missing a lot of family birthdays, your boo, your space and all your schooling. Time to make some hard decisions and to stick with them!

A Funeral

One night, while me and my cousin was asleep, my other big cousin got shot. I woke up and my mom said he was dead. I cried, and went back to sleep. I woke up and I just was mad. Then I went to his funeral. Then we did the burial. Then we ate and said our good-byes, RIP Big Bruh Eugene.

-Faga

From The Beat: This is sad, Faga. Are you planning to change anything in your life so that you don't leave your mother in tears?

Change Begins With Me

Being in jail is hard because you got to deal with people who tell you what to do — told when to eat, to sleep, to talk. Man, you know what I am saying. But people still come back to jail. So who you think fault is that they let people tell them what to do? Me and them, so we got to stop it tomorrow. No, we got to stop it today! But I got to work on me first.

-Mike

From The Beat: You are absolutely right... unless you make the necessary changes, the system will keep responding in the same way, and you will keep finding yourself in a box. So tell us, when you say you've got to work on yourself first, what do you have in mind?

Missing You

Missin' you daily. Thinkin' about you every day. Sayin', "Damn. You really gone. It really don't seem real." I miss you so much.

I remember we was at the center and we was all sitting on the couch, and you just got up in the middle of the floor and start dancing, making everybody laugh. You always cheered everybody up. Man, I miss them days. I looked up to you. You were my idol. Miss you so much I wish you were here helping me.

Well, I want you to know that I love you. I want you back. Save me a spot. Love you, Nisha, always.

-Rina B

From The Beat: You don't say how Nisha passed, but we know it could not have been a natural death, and we're sorry for your loss. We hope you find a way to stay out of the system and to stay healthy for a long, long life so that you can honor Nisha's memory for as long as you live.

Misunderstood

Why do people judge me by the way I look? They say I'm a bad influence or what ever. They don't know the real me. They don't know what I've been through. Thinking they went through everything we did, but worse. I've been through some hard-ass times, but that's never changed my personality. No matter what happen, I'm hella nice or even too nice.

Next time when someone judges me or you, let them know who you really are. The true you is all anyone needs to judge you. Like the old saying "Don't judge a book by its cover."

-Chowsee

From The Beat: We definitely agree with you that it's wrong to judge people by outside appearances and surface things. And it's good to read that you are always nice. But should the system have power to judge you for the acts you commit? Should they be able to label you a thief if you steal, or a murderer if you kill? How should the criminal justice system operate unless it's based on judgments? Or, should there be two kinds of judgments, those given by the courts for the purpose of punishment, and those the rest of us make every day?

Helpless Thoughts

Man, what's the word, Beat? Dis D-M. Yeah, off top I most definitely be feeling helpless when I be in here. I got a lil' sister and she getting hella big, and in a minute she finna be talking to boys an' shhh. What if she don't like one 'cause he stank or his fit game ain't up, and she like, "Naw, I'm good," and he get mad like, "You ain't all that anyway." You know how ninjas be. Well, not me, but yeah, if I'm in here I can't do nothing, feel me. But we don't think about that before we did what I we did, so what I'ma say is just think before you do something 'cause the halls would have you thinking a lot, feel me!

-D-M

From The Beat: Yes, we do feel you. We know how much it hurts to know that the world is moving forward without you. This can really be painful when you see that you've let your little sister down by now being there to guide and protect her. All you can do now is follow your own advice and think before you do something. The next time you're tempted to do something that could lead you back to the box, ask yourself if you'd want your little sister to see you doing whatever it is you're doing. If the answer to that is no, then don't do it!

Virginia Tech

Man, I just got to say, I really get why that Korea dude did what we did. That Asian ninja was fed up with up with them snotty-ass rich white kids treating him less than them. I've been in that kind of position in my life before, and I understand where dude was coming from. Now, I'm saying what he did was good, but I really do feel for the guy.

I remember my moms put me at some rich school back in the day, where I was the only one that didn't have to pay tuition 'cause of my mom's financial problems. Anyways, the kids there was all rich Russians, and I remember one time one white boy called me "wetback," and all the kids in the class started laughing. I told him his ignorant ass was the wrong, that I was black, white and a lil' Cuban. And ninja said, "Like, that's better."

Like the Korean dude, I didn't handle the situation the "right way." I got my homeboys to come to the school during lunch break and took off on the boy who felt so superior to me 'cause of my skin color.

Anyways, I said what I wanted to say. Now I'm gone.

-Maya

From The Beat: As long as you acknowledge that the violence he unleashed on those students was not the way to handle any situation, we have no problem with your assessment of what it means to have to put up with ignorant people who think they are better than anyone else because they make more money or have more opportunities or have a skin color they feel is superior to other skin colors. We, too, have experienced this kind of ignorance, and we, too, hate it. And while we can feel your sympathy for the Korean young man who was the victim of such hateful ignorance, the real remedy for ignorance is education. When you say you didn't handle your problem with the rich white Russian kids "the right way," can you tell us what "the right way" would have looked like? What do you think is the proper way to handle racism and classism when you are the victim of it?

Depression

I am depressed because I got to be in juvie 'til May 7. I'm gettin' sent to a group home. I been locked up since March 7. I'm so mad because I missed a lot of things that went on in da outs.

Most importantly, I'm depressed 'cause my ex-boy friend died April 30th, and I gotta be in here. Now I can't visit him and it's going to be a year he been dead. Also getting sent to a group home is kinda makin' me think 'bout a lot. I just miss being in the outs.

-Luv Anna

From The Beat: Of course you miss being free. That's what being in jail (or the hall) is all about — taking you from the things you love and, hopefully, making you think about what you need to do to stay out of places like this. So, do you know what changes you have to make in your life in order to avoid the depression that comes with incarceration?

Feeling Helpless

Man, I am feeling helpless because I have been in and out of this system for three years. Last year I got sentenced to out-of-home placement, and I have been running ever since. I kinda regret it because I am going to the Ranch for a year, but I am gone be cool up there. But I am still feeling helpless because I feel like I am never gone go home. I be feeling trapped sometimes, isolated from the outside world. But I am about to do this time and prove jail wrong. I am out.

-Menace

From The Beat: That helpless feeling that you'll never go home is understandable, but you know that you will be going home one day. It's what you do when you get out of here that will determine just how helpless — or hopeful — you will feel in the future. If you keep doing whatever it is that has led you to lose your freedom (and your hope), then you can expect more of the same. But if you change your act, you can expect a different (and better reaction).

Crying For The Lost Homies

I wake up every morning facin' these four white walls. I feel so helpless when I can't check up on my little cousins who I know that's livin' in the fast lane and would do anything for a gold chain.

You living at a high risk when you choose to be in a gang. My heart goes out to all my dead homies who left they parents and loved ones just to stay true to the game. Man, my tissue's soaked and wet. Every time I turn around, somebody new shot down. I hear rounds of sounds around my town.

-Lil' JT

From The Beat: Crying for the dead is appropriate, but we want to hear how you are planning your life, so that you don't have others crying over you. What do you do to avoid the shots you hear around your town? What are you doing to prepare yourself so that when you touch down, you'll be able to go to school and enjoy the freedom you were born for?

The Pain And Pressure of Being Misunderstood

Being misunderstood irritates me because everywhere I go people got something to say like, ain't you this and that. I correct them, let them know what's right. People judge me from not even knowin' me. The way I handle it is by just ignoring it because words don't hurt me. Anybody can say what they want. I know who I am and what I do.

-Luv Anna

From The Beat: Even though you say words don't hurt, we wonder if that's always true. But whether they hurt or not, we applaud your strategy of just ignoring it when someone says something stupid or ignorant to you. Are you ever guilty of judging others you don't really know?

This Boy

It's this boy that I was with before I came to jail, and I'm vary stressed out because I don't know what he's doing or is he cheatin' or is he staying faithful? I'm really head over heels for him and if he not stayin' positive because now when we talk, things don't seem the same. I mean he seem very happy to talk to me. but I know something is up.

-Jaccarri Cash

From The Beat: We have to say the same thing to you that we say when we read of a boy wondering if his girl is cheating on him, and that is to question your definition of cheating. After all, when you did whatever it was that gave "them" the power to take you from him, you were cheating him out of your presence. You put something that was important to you ahead of him. Having done that, how long should he wait for you? How long would you wait for him?

My Concern

My personal concern is my right hand man, also known as my big bra. Right now he's incarcerated like I am, but in Bruno. I'm concerned about him 'cause they trying to throw hella time over his head for a lil' bit of nothin'. I'm hopin' he get around his shhh and get back ASAP, especially 'cause I'm down.

But yeah, I just heard I'ma be down for minute. Lawyer talking some nonsense. I'm starting to miss things on the outs like my better half. I be thinking about her. Lately I try not to, 'cause of the time I got. But yeah, you know how that go. But I'm really concerned about my bra Fee. Can't hold a real ninja forever.

-Jr. Rhyda

From The Beat: The belief that they can't hold "a real ninja forever" is pure bs! And, as long as you hold onto that kind of childish belief, you are in danger of learning the hard way just how wrong you are! We hope your brother's outcome is good, but when you say he's there for "a lil' bit of nothin'," once again you expose a way of thinking that is not designed to lead you away from places like this. There is no sense of personal responsibility in this piece. Your lawyer talks nonsense. Your brother did "nothin'." As long as your finger points outward and not inward for the consequences you're now experiencing, you can count on experiencing them again. If you want to have some kind of lasting relationship with your "better half," then you're going to have to make some changes. It's that simple.

Helpless

What's up with The Beat? Man, I really am helpless in here thinking about what my baby boy is doing on the outs. When I talked to him he said he was being faithful and I want to trust and believe him. But you really don't know what's going on. I can only have faith and trust that he's doing right by me. I only hope he is. Love you.

-Imani

From The Beat: Faithful? What's that? Who were you being faithful to when you did whatever it was that let the system take you away from him? Did you put him ahead of yourself then?

Praying For My Family

At this day and age my personal concern is my sisters and mother. When I wake up, I pray that my family have awoken with me. I pray that my niece or nephew is safe and healthy. That my mom stays on her toes. That my sis D'eb do her and keep stuntin' on competition... To main squeeze, keep missing me...and to all my boy friends, I love you all "Baby".

-NeNe Baby

From The Beat: If you know what led you to be separated from your family, then you also know what you have to change in order to stay with them. Don't let them and yourself down when you get out of here.

My Personal Concern

I think that my personal concern is my life and what I am going to do when I get out of here. I think that I am going to really change my life around, and live positive and change some of them things that I have did before by doing them very differently. Like, instead of being a hustler and living the fast life, getting fast money, I would get a job and get money the right way. And I would go to school every day, instead of cutting class all of the time because I realize that education is the right thing for me. So when I get out my concern is to turn my life around.

-Marquita

From The Beat: We think you're doing exactly the right thing for your future by focusing on going to school every day and avoiding the fast lane (which leads you right back here). But we worry when we read words like "I think that I am going to really change..." and "I would go to school..." Words like "I think" and "I would" are not as strong as words like, "I will..." What do you have to think about? You know that if you don't change, the results won't change either, and you'll keep finding yourself behind four walls wishing that things were different. And they will be different if you make them different.

The Beat Appreciated

I would volunteer at The Beat whenever I would get out of U5. I would like for people to help The Beat. I feel appreciated that The Beat comes from their own time for us to express ourself through paper instead of anger. I really want for The Beat to get help. I really need their help for me to write and express my mind through paper so I could get support, feed back.

Yes, it is very important for the world not to turn their backs on me 'cause I need programs that would help express and get a job. I would talk to The Beat of what can I do. All I can do is talk and have y'all back.

I'm in here, so let me know waz up and I'll spit game to them old farts that don't wanna help my favorite program 'cause they need to break their pockets to help y'all instead of making more jails.

-Young Hitters

From The Beat: One of the rewards for doing the work we do is reading pieces like this that tell us what we're doing is meaningful to at least one person. And we can use all the help we can get to let the outside world know just how important it is for young men and young women to be able to express themselves. Thank you for your support, and thank you for writing every week to make The Beat what it is.

Feeling Helpless

While I'm incarcerated, I feel helpless because I can't talk to any of my friends. And I can't do what I like to do. I deal with it by letting the days go by and thinking about what I'm going to do when I get out. I think about how to correct the situation now and next time it ever happens.

-Sybreea

From The Beat: Why not share some of what you're thinking about what's going to happen when you get out. If you don't start planning (making a real plan) for your freedom, then you will not be able to hold onto it.

Five Years From Now

This day and age my personal concern is my life, where would I be five years from now. I hope I'll be living a good life and doing what I got to do. Maybe have some kids of my own one day, maybe a wife too. I wouldn't mind that, not at all.

But five years from now... out of high school/college, my on house or apartment with everything I want, and work hard for my money, not by selling drugs, an' stuff like that. And I know I'm going to make it. I know I can do whatever I put my mind to.

-Man Man

From The Beat: Yes, we know you can accomplish whatever you choose to accomplish, Man Man. That first item on your game plan ("out of high school/college") is the foundation for all the rest. Don't forget to get your schooling, even when it's boring. Not only do you need it for that house, apartment, job, etc. (even decent wife), but education will open up doors to opportunities you won't know anything about until you get there. Good luck!

Why I Do What I Do!

I do what I do because I don't know nothing else. I was brought up good by my parents. But my 'hood looked like it was coo' to be out there hustlin', smokin', kickin' it with my folks.

Me personally, I started hustlin' 'cause moms was strugglin' with the rent and with the other bills in our household and puttin' food on the table. I would sell anything I got my hands on, from drugs, from robbing people for their personal belongings. (especially jewelry and laptops).

I did what I had to! Wasn't nobody gone stop me from doing what I was doing! I started smoking 'cause I chose to, didn't nobody peer pressure me to or anything like that. But now I'm starting to see the picture! I'm done with this shhh. So forget the streets and the people on them! Fo' real. Tone Kiki out!

-Tone-Kiki

From The Beat: Even though we really like your commitment to change, we can't agree with you that nobody influenced you to do the things you did. All children (including you, including us) follow what we see. If no one around you was smoking, you would not have started smoking. If no one around you was jacking or hustling, you wouldn't have done those things, either. So the real question is not why you did what you did (it's what you were exposed to as a child); the real question is what are you going to do now that you are a young adult and can think for yourself. That's why we're so encouraged by how you ended this piece. You recognize that you can now make your own choices for your own life — and this isn't the life you want. Good for you!

Why Do I Do What I Do

Why do I do what I do? I do what I do because nobody can else can do it. What I do is I do me. There will never be another me, so no one will ever be me and do what I do. People might want to be me and do what I do, but it will never happen because you can't be me, and thus can't do what I do.

You can be yourself and do you, but you will never be me. Do what I do. Get it how I get it. Live how I live. And that's just the way it is.

-Jungle

From the Beat: You know, you could have made this a far better piece of thinking and writing if you had taken it to the next level. We get your point that nobody can do what you do because nobody is you. But having said that, what else can you offer? When you say you do you, what does that mean? Aren't there things that we all do, whether it's you or anyone else? If you asked a staff why he does what he does, and he answered, "Because I'm me," would that answer satisfy you?

The Future

My main concern is if I'm going to finish school. To a lot of people, that's not very important. But to me it is. In my family not that many people finished high school. A smaller amount finished college.

My parents think that I'm not going to finish high school. They think I'm just lazy and don't wanna do nothing. But what they don't know is I do want to finish school. Hell, I even wanna go to college because I know I could get paid a lot more.

I deal with all this by ignoring my parents' comments. Even though school is hard, I try my best. Grades are super bad, but I still try. To many people this isn't a big issue. But sometimes I think what's gonna happen in my future if I don't finish school. I'm not trying to work 15 hrs a day and get paid minimum wage. I see my parents coming home really tired most of the time. They just have enough for food and rent. I'm trying to have a better life for me.

-Jonathan

From The Beat: We think you've analyzed your situation exactly right, and we are impressed! You are right to see education as your key to a decent life, and you are right to ignore your parents' negative comments about the possibility of your success. We're sorry your grades aren't good (and we'd be happy to help you with any subject you think we could be of help with), but the fact that you still try your best is what counts! Most of your peers want to get that "better life" too, but they aren't willing to do the hard work that is required to build a foundation, and that is the work of learning, of gaining knowledge about as many things as you can. You have correctly identified the goal. Now, keep your eyes on that prize and move forward step-by-step. You CAN graduate from high school and you CAN go to college. It won't be easy, but then, neither is a life of making minimum wage... Good luck!

Dedicated To My Feelings

Ninja only putting yourself down
Just some one who puts another man into the ground
Don't think about the consequence
Just let's go pull that lick and hop that fence
A ninja just another brother on D Row didn't pick up that pen
Could have been another man's hero. Wow! Picture that
Didn't want to go to school, rather pick up a gat
Ninja just degrading ourselves
There's power to knowledge as death is to a gun
Life is too short; you might as well have some fun

-Clappa

From The Beat: We're a little confused by your conclusion. You seem to be saying that you can be somebody (even somebody's hero) if you think about consequences, and if you get yourself an education. But by ending with the advice to "have some fun," you undermine that important message. We're not against having some fun, but when that "fun" leads to lock-up, it's time to redefine "fun."

Loving Myself

It could be good or bad, right or wrong, small or big
But in your eyes, no matter what I do
It's never good enough for you
Why is it that you always find a way to put me down?
Every time you look at me, it's always with a frown.
I don't get it. Some people are just so negative.
Life is a struggle. Everybody goes through different situations
Whether you accepted or not.
Sometimes you got to take things for what they're worth.
But it so easy to just give up Yup. Very true.
You can hate me or you can love me, I really don't care
As long as I love myself... it is only fair.

-Lil' Bipp

From The Beat: You're right that loving yourself is the necessary beginning of loving others, and being loved by others. As a friend once told us, everyone wants three things in life: to be loved, to be listened to, and to be respected. So if you have people in your life who do not respect you, then leave them behind to find their own way. In the meantime, change the things you need to change in your life so that you are doing things worthy of respect — yours as well as others'.

What Problem?

I don't see what the problem is. I'm just a young man trying get my own money without having to answer to nobody but myself. I'm just trying to build my own empire the only way I know how, the only way I was taught, and the only way I could see myself getting that much money in the period of time I needed to get it by, and dat's what I did.

-Capone

From The Beat: And that's why you're here. We can't really believe you when you say you don't see what the problem is. We're don't know what shortcut you took to find your riches, but all you've managed to do is enrich the system, putting money in the pockets of your keepers. As children, we follow what we see, so we can't hold you responsible for the things you did that you saw everyone else doing when you were a kid. But you aren't a kid any more, and now the entire system will hold you responsible for the choices you make. If you don't know that the consequences of your choices can lead to the loss of your freedom (or worse), then that IS the problem.

Do What It Do

Here I am asked to write about what I do and why I do it. Well, the first thing that came to my head was my drug use. I sometimes think why I do drugs. Why do I spend money on something that kills me? I realized that I use drugs to run away from problems.

I remember the first time I smoked some weed. It made me feel good, and all my problems in school went away instantly. I remember just sitting in class and looking at the teacher like everything was good. He came up to me and asked why I'm not doing any work. I said "It's cool, I'll still pass this class." But really, deep inside, I knew that I wouldn't pass.

Ever since I started to use drugs, I have been fascinated with them. I would spend days out of my week on the internet studying about them. It was like it was me and the drugs, and nothing else. As I kept using drugs over the years, they put me in jail and drug programs. I even went to a military school in Florida to get away from drugs here in the city. That was a big mistake.

In Florida, my relationship with drugs become closer. I was far away from home and I was depressed. I found out about DXM there, and that became my new favorite drug. Many people know it as triple C's. I was hooked on it and even OD'd on it.

Just recently I was placed in a group home called Thunder Road. It was a place where they helped kids like me get over my drug addiction. Well, I did the program for like three weeks and ran. I ran because I did not think I had a drug problem. Well, when I ran, the first thing I did when I got to the city was smoke and take DXM. At first it was good, but as the high wore off, I realized what I did. I caused more problems for myself.

Now I am back in the hall for the 5th time, waiting for interviews to get accepted into another group home. This whole juvy thing is getting old. I hope that I will get over my addiction with drugs and be back in my own home.

Don't do drugs. They don't solve problems, they make them. Peace out.

-Lionfishy

From The Beat: We hope your sad experience with drugs will serve as a lesson for someone who still has the chance to avoid the path that leads to jail, to programs — or to hospitals and cemeteries! A couple of things you wrote jumped out at us. You said that when you first smoked weed, all your school problems disappeared. But, of course, that can't be true. The problems were still there, while you had the illusion that they were not. And that illusion — and that easy chemical escape — actually made those problems worse. The other line that truly astonished us was your reason for running from Thunder Road ("I did not think I had a drug problem.") How could it be that you didn't think you had a problem? All this tells us is that addiction is a powerful disease that can convince you that what you know is not what you know, and that you can handle what you know you can't handle. If Thunder Road is not the right program for you, then find another. You are fighting against a powerful adversary, a trickster that can convince you that black is white. Don't try to fight it alone. But do fight it. You have far too much going for you (a good brain, a good heart, an honest soul) to allow yourself to be controlled by anything outside yourself!

Judging

Do you ever feel like people are judging you for what you look like on the outside instead of taking time to get to know how you are on the inside? I get like that while I'm on the outs a lot! I always think that I'm being zeroed in on by everybody that sees me on the street.

Most people judge me by the clothes I wear. Just because I dress different, doesn't mean I'm a bad person. How do you feel about this Beat?

-Nick

From The Beat: We feel exactly the same way, that we should not judge a book by its cover or a human being by what he or she wears. But you know, Nick, we all make snap judgments about people all the time, even though we should not. Don't you look at people you don't know, and judge them by their outside qualities — how they dress, how old they are, their race or ethnic background, their sex? Have you ever made one of those snap judgments about somebody, only to learn after getting to know them that you were wrong?

This Ain't Right Being Locked Up

This ain't right being locked up. The people that I'm hurting is my family, especially my mom, because she stressing so hard 'cause my two older brothers are locked up also. I hope this the first and last time being locked up.

-Oscar

From The Beat: Yes, we hope you learn enough from this experience to make this your last trip to juvenile hall. If your older brothers are locked up, then you know what to expect if you don't make some necessary changes in your life.

Love Yo' Family

What good Beat? Dis yo' young ninja Domo. Yeah, I'm still lock up, but I am getting' out soon, I hope. I had court today, but it did not go good.

I just want you ninja know to love yo' family man 'cause you know I lost a big brother and dis shhh still hurt. But I got one more big brother left and if I lose him I am goin' to go bad. But I am going to keep my head up and y'all do da same. I am out.

-Domo

From The Beat: We hate to read of brothers and sisters losing brothers and sisters. We hope you don't lose your second brother, but we also know that he doesn't want to lose you. So, make your first priority to find a way to keep yourself safe, alive and free.

Judge Me By My Actions

Man, I been here 18 times, and never really write to The Beat. I don't express myself by writing. I act. I want to be judged by action.

-G

From The Beat: Well, if you've been here 18 times, then your actions already speak louder than your words. You might try writing some of your thinking down, though, because what you're doing (your actions) clearly is not serving you very well. Why not try writing and see where that leads?

What I Feel Now

I'm sittin' in da halls feelin' ashamed with no blame or harm. Most of the time my tears feel clear, like ice cubes runnin' away, like cold ice water with no type of temperature bubble. Mostly what I feel now that back stabbers ain't nothing.

-Yung Breezy

From The Beat: We almost didn't publish this piece because you don't explain things that might teach the reader what you're trying to say. For example, why are you crying? What can you do to change the picture so that you don't have to shed tears? And how did the "back stabbers" get into the picture? We decided to publish it so we could ask you one question: If there is no "blame" and no "harm," what is it that you feel ashamed of?

Feeling Helpless

My mom's birthday was yesterday. I wanted to be with her hella much and show her that I was there for her. I didn't even want her to come see me yesterday. I really wanted to be with her to have fun with her on her special day. But because I messed up, all that didn't happen this year.

-Marvin

From The Beat: We're sorry you weren't able to be with your mom on her birthday, but the fact that you understand that it was you who messed it up makes us hope and believe that maybe this is the last birthday you will miss. The best birthday present you could give your mother is to make something of your life, and to never allow the system to take you from her again.

About To Be A Father

I'm feeling helpless because my girl is pregnant, and I can't be there for her. Even though I only got to be here for a week, it feels like a year when I'm not with her. I'm not trying to be like my father. He was in juvenile hall when I was born, and I'm not trying to do that.

-Young D

From The Beat: We hope you're free (and able to stay free) when your baby is born. Carefully examine the law of consequences and decide which is more important to you, a lifestyle that leads you here or a child at home in need of a father. Your choices will tell us (and yourself) what your priorities are.

A Big Change

What changed my life was in middle school. The people I was hanging with were the wrong people, and I changed and started to be a different person, doing bad mistakes. Now I regret all that I done. I changed by being influenced by my friends doing bad things in the streets. Started banging, claiming stupid stuff. But now that I'm in YGC, when I get out I'm through with all that.

-Lil' Michael

From The Beat: It's easy to get caught up when you are just a boy following bigger boys into trouble. But you are not a little boy any more, so it's time for you to think and act for yourself. We believe you when you say you are "through with all that," but we know that is easy to say when you are locked up, but much harder to do when you are free to make your own choices again. Don't forget this promise, Michael. If you go back to your boys you will face the same consequences you're facing now. And those consequences only get harder as you get older. Now's the time.

A Respectful And Honest Man

Wish for the best, hope for the worst

Love is what he shows me

Communication is the number one key

Read between the lines

Abusive is what he's not, but happy is what he makes me

He can be respectful and very honest

-Carmen

From The Beat: What we like about this piece is that you have described this boy's character, which is what attracts you to him, and not how he looks on the outside. Beauty fades; character lasts forever. However, we don't understand that first line. Why would you hope for the worst? Did you just make a mistake and reverse the adjectives?

Day Dreaming

I'm sitting in my box just day dreamin', just day dreamin' about all the fun I have on the outs. I never think about the cell 'cause when I look at them four walls I feel angry.

But when I think about being outside, I feel as if I am really there. Time flies past fast like a Nascar. "Zoom!"

Well, there's my door. I'm out. Peace.

-Zoom

From The Beat: When you think about "all the fun" you had on the outs, do you ever think about how some of that "fun" has led you here, behind those four walls that make you so angry? In other words, is your anger ever directed at yourself for giving away your freedom for the choices you made?

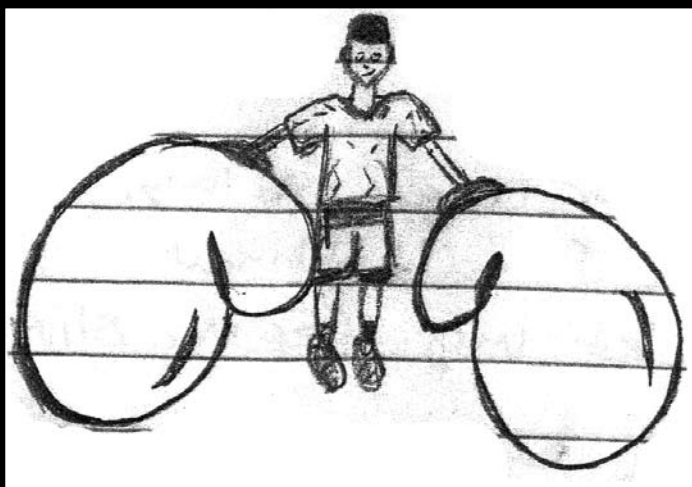
Locked Up

I feel bad because I got locked up for the first time three years ago, and I feel bad because I'm in here the day of my anniversary when I got locked up for the first time. I also feel bad because my mom been telling me to get out of a gang, but as hard headed as I am, I haven't listened to one word that she said, and I've been stupid ever since.

I have to go, Beat. Peace.

-Sneeky

From The Beat: You call yourself "hard headed" and "stupid" for not listening to your mom's excellent advice. But there are other adjectives that describe your behavior: selfish, childish, self-destructive. We don't say these things to make you feel bad, but to tell you that you can turn it all around by changing those adjectives. Be thoughtful (not stupid). And by "thoughtful" we mean to think of all the consequences of every choice you make — not just those negative consequences that you will certainly face, but what you are doing to your mom who has sacrificed so much for you. Change starts with your own mind. Don't wait.



Willing To Volunteer

I think people should volunteer at The Beat because it's important to the young adults in the juvenile justice system to have a writing program for expressing themselves. A lot of people have trouble expressing how they feel or what's on their mind to others. It's a great program for us young adults to relieve some stress. I would be willing to volunteer to help The Beat program stay above water.

-Baby C

From The Beat: Just writing this helps us. It gives us the strength to keep coming back even when our resources are drying up. But nobody knows the strength of The Beat more than those who make it what it is — which is you and the other wonderful writers who open up their lives to us week after week. Thank you.

What I Feel Now

I'm sittin' in da halls feelin' ashamed with no blame or harm. Most of the time my tears feel clear, like ice cubes runnin' away, like cold ice water with no type of temperature bubble. Mostly what I feel now that back stabbers ain't nothing.

-Yung Breezy

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My Big Hit

My big hit was when I seen my 'cousin Ne Nee at his funeral in the casket dead. I just started to cry. I had to cool myself down but it was kinda hard.

-Mike

From The Beat: Crying at your cousin's funeral is very appropriate, even though we wish you didn't have to experience these kind of tears. Have you spent any time since cooling yourself down to think about your own life, and what you want out of it? We hope you have, and that you have thought about how to get there from here. Your cousin's death is a reminder of how one life (including yours) affects so many other lives.

Blaming Ourselves

Being with bad people is not good because they can get you in a lot of trouble, like get you to do stupid things, like robbing people and being in a gang. That make you go to jail and do time. But you don't learn 'cause we go back to the block and do the same thing. So who is bad — you and me or we blame other people.

-Lil' Nephew

From The Beat: Yes, Lil' Nephew, your peers can make you feel like you have to do things you know you shouldn't do so that you can be accepted by them. But they can't make you do things. Only you can make yourself do things — or not do things. There comes a time when you have to stand up for yourself, and act according to your principles, and not someone else's. For example, can you, personally, justify robbing people? If you know that's wrong, then you must be responsible enough not to do it, no matter what your friends tell you to do. This requires much more courage than being in a gang or robbing someone. It's the kind of courage that has to be acted on individually, standing alone, and it isn't easy. Do you have what it takes to be that strong?

Dedicated To Today

Don't worry about tomorrow
 It's hard enough worrying about today
 Tomorrow is never promised
 So think about wiser decisions to make
 Consequences come after mistakes
 So let's be real and don't worry about the fake
 Hard individuals really are easy to break
 Life is all about the choices you make
 We're not always dealt a good hand
 But how we play our cards determine if you'll win
 These are just a few words that I've learned from a friend
 Don't worry about tomorrow 'cause today haven't even begin

-Clappa

From The Beat: It may be good advice not to "worry" about tomorrow, but that is very different from planning for tomorrow. Tomorrow will come, and unless you build a foundation, you'll just be swept along with whatever current that comes along. You're right when you say that "Consequences come after mistakes," but the truth is, consequences come after everything we do — and everything we don't do. You can't avoid consequences, but you can determine what they will be. So, what choices are you planning to make that lead to better consequences than these?

Spacing Out

As I was day dreaming in my room, I thought about my future. I have court on May 4th, and I'm not sure where I'm gonna be placed yet. I'm thinkin' that I just wanna go back to my old school and graduate from there, but other people are recommending CYA, Colorado, or my auntie's house.

If I do go to my aunt's, there will be so many rules. People saying I might do weekends or have an ankle monitor. Whatever happens, I just wanna get back on the right track.

(Before I could finish my thoughts, I got called out for The Beat program.)

-Baby C

From The Beat: We would love for you to be able to finish your thoughts, so we have a better understanding of where you stand and where you want to stand. At the same time, we think you are bringing a very mature attitude to your future. We know you have your own desires about where the system should — and should not — place you, but the most important element for success is the attitude you bring to any program they send you to. So, by telling us that wherever they send you, all you want is for your life to get back on track, you are telling us that you are ready to make that change. Keep moving forward, and don't stop writing.

Supporting The Beat

If I was to write a promotional letter to people saying why they should keep volunteers at The Beat, I would explain how it really feels to be locked up and having nothing to do, and how it would feel to get some type of recognition, despite the fact that we are in jail for whatever reason it is.

To be in jail and sittin' in our room regretting what we have done and knowing that we have to do time feeling miserable and hopeless, expressing our feeling through writing, and letting out some emotional stress and express how we truly feel with our words!

Me personally, it makes me feel so much better when I express myself in my writing.

-Ashley

From The Beat: You have expressed two excellent reasons for what makes The Beat so special. The first is that it is a tool to reach out to a public that knows far too little about what your lives are like. That second is that it is a tool for self-expression which always makes us feel better. We're very happy we can provide these tools to you, but in the end, you are The Beat, not us. So thank you.

Don't Like Work

I went to a workshop where they help you get a job. At the end, they pay you \$180. I don't like to work so I didn't get a job, but I got the money.

-Chinky

From The Beat: So, you cheated the workshop presenters out of \$180, since you didn't plan to get a job in the first place. Oops, we're wrong. You didn't cheat them. You cheated yourself. Keep it up, and you'll find yourself spending long years in places where you will never have to work. See if that makes you happy.

Day Dreaming In My Room

Day dreaming in my room, I have a lot money on my bed and the floor, and a lot or girls on my bed, and some weed and some gin juice and I have freedom.

-Jacquar

From The Beat: This is not a day dream, this is pure fantasy, the kind a child has when he thinks he can fly. We find it interesting that even in this fantasy, freedom comes after money, sex, weed and alcohol. Maybe it's time to re-arrange your priorities...

A Big Hit

Wassup wit da Beat? It's ya boy Bunte comin' out of U6. Just got tranferred from U3.

Since I haven't been hit yet, something that will wake me up is when somebody start messin' wit ma family. Whatever happen in the streets need to stay in the streets 'cause when it come to family, I'ma probably just zone out and do something I'ma regret.

But back to the point. It might make me want to change the way I'm doin', but I'm 'bout to be outta here to the grouper by next week, so I'ma get at you next time.

-Young Bunte

From The Beat: We've got a nasty wake-up call for you, Bunte. You are the one who is "messin' wit' your family." That's right, you! It's you who have caused them to cry in sadness because you're not there to help them and to love them. It's you who have chosen to satisfy your own ego at the expense of their comfort and happiness. So if you truly want to wake up, take a good look at who has already messed with your family, and then decide whether some changes might be in order.

This Dimension?

Do you believe in the fourth dimension?

Well, I do, because have you ever thought there were other living things out there, like the UFO? Maybe they are watching us. We don't know. They could see us, but we can't see them. All those crop circles—they are trying to communicate with us. All right.

Did you know goldfish can't see us because they have sixteen channels in their eyes and we only got five channels? They might see more things than us and the fish tank is a fourth dimension object, so there really are other things outside that we don't see.

Just like God—we don't know if he exists, but he might be in the fourth dimension world, like all the other ghosts and spirits—we can't see them unless they have a purpose to come out, but they are always looking at us.

Well, if you want to be like me, a philosopher, look up books on philosophy—that's how I got started.

-Chinatown Philosopher

From The Beat: Nobody is absolutely sure about how the physical world was created, works, or evolves, but your speculations about it are fascinating. Many people who were involved in the Roswell incident down in Arizona in 1941, (when supposedly an alien space ship crashed and left remnants of some amazingly strong, thin tensile steel and the body of one dead alien behind, before the others took off) still defend that story as real. It's very convincing. What are the channels that goldfish (and humans) have? What other examples can you think of that lead you to believe there are more than three dimensions?

Dumb Decisions

Well, I can say I'm careless 'cause I made bad decisions in my life. Taking cars, holding things to protect me, then using my words instead. I'm not stupid, but I made dumb-ass decisions. I really wish that I can go back in time and change, but you also know that I happy that time can't go back because I won't be the person I am.

When I get out I would know what to do when I get out next time. Do the opposite... go to the right, not the left. I really need to change 'cause I only got ten months to change my ways and I need to get on it. And if people think I can't do it, like the DA, they can go to hell 'cause if I think I can do it. I will make it 'cause I'm the one who chooses my path, not them.

-Ricardo

From The Beat: You're so right, Ricardo. You're the one who chooses the path you'll take, not them. So it doesn't matter whether you tell the DA to go to hell or not. The only thing that matters is that you make the changes you know you need to make. And don't wait ten months to change. The fact that you know you have to change and that you want to change means that you have already started to change. Change is not easy, but it's also not easy to keep doing the same thing and keep facing the same — or worse — consequences. The person you have to show is not the DA, not your counselors, not the judge, and not The Beat. The person you have to show is yourself.

A Big Hit

A big hit that can change the way I am is my family. They think I'm bad and out of control sometimes, but I'm really not. I am cool and down to earth. I like to chill and hang out with my family and friends. I love my life, and don't think I will jeopardize it unless someone really just did something shady to my family. I'll give life for them. If the cost is my life to leaving my brother, sister and especially my mother, then that's a price I'll pay.

I put my life in harm's way a couple of times for my thugs, but it was nothin'. That's because it's only one person that's not family I'll go all out for, and that's my right hand man, ya dig. I love that ninja to death. That's why I would do the things I'll do for him.

-Jr.

From The Beat: You have to examine your own behavior and how it affects and has already affected the family you love so much. It's not enough to say you'd give your life for them. They don't want you to do that. We don't want to be too hard on you, but by doing the things that allowed the system to take you from them, you've already hurt them when they only want your help — meaning your love and presence. So, don't talk about dying for them. Instead, talk about living for them. And to do that, you have to find a way to stay free. That's what they want. That's what we want. And that's what you want.

A Big Hit

In my life I had a big hit when I first came to YGC. After that everything changed. I got put on probation when I got out, and now I'm back in here. I'm back in here just doing time and not knowing when I'm coming out.

All I think about when I'm in here is just to do different things and make good decisions when I come out. All I want to do is do my time in here and get out and do good.

-Weasel

From The Beat: We need a lot more details about your plan. Wanting to do good is not a plan, it's a goal, a promise. The part that's missing from this piece is the step-by-step plan that will take you there. You should have experienced enough of this bad situation by now to want something different. Tell us how you'll get it.

Carelessness

I was careless about school most of the time when I was out. At the time, I was not thinking about the consequences. That's why I'm here, 'cause I caught a new case and school affected when I got locked up.

-Young O

From The Beat: It's hard to realize at your age that school is truly what is important to your future. If you go to school every day, it not only gives you the foundation you need to build your life on, but it keeps you from doing the kinds of things that lead you here. Is there a way you can live without catching any new cases?

A Big Hit

The one thing that would make me leave this street shhh alone is this. If somehow I came upon a "mill ticket" I'm done. That's more money then I will probably see in my life, so to me that's worth it. No matter how I would get it or what I would do to get it, that would make me quit this shhh for good

-Jungle

From the Beat: Well, since we all know that you're not going to find a million dollars in the street, does that mean that you plan to settle for intermittent slavery, because that's the price of your choices. If you doubt it, look around. If you got more than this little bit of time — say a year, say five years, say 25 years — how would that affect your decision to leave the streets behind?

Wars!

Wars are stupid,
pointless.

They should just call "Peace,"
so we can live happily ever after,
like in stories.

-Lil' Eric

From The Beat: You put so simply what millions of people feel in their hearts. Sometimes the most basic answer is also the most profound.

My First Time

It was at my house. We started slow. He pulled it out and it was long, fat and brown. I couldn't believe it! Minutes later, he hittin' it. He started takin' deep breaths that let me know it was good, so now we both into it.

Later, I got hungry. After, it was time for round two. The room started to become very gloomy. After we finished my dad walked in. That's when my temperature rose. After that I told myself, "This will be my last time ever getting' high."

-LaDonna

From The Beat: Even though we're glad that you reached the conclusion you did ("never again"), we're wondering what made you decide that. If your father had not found you high, would you still be smoking? Or, was it the gloomy room? What led you to the choice you made... and good luck keeping that important promise (which is easier to keep when you're locked up and not exposed to temptation than when you're back out there and have to exercise some personal courage — the kind that lets you say no to friends).

Doing Time

Doing time is the most messed up shhh that can happen to a person.

Doing time can also be a great thing for that person.
Doing time is a great time to get your head clear and become a better person

To guide our younger group in a better direction.

-No Name

From The Beat: It's true that doing time can either mess up or benefit someone, or even both. How has your time inside affected you? You sound like your head has become pretty clear. Do you have younger brothers, sisters, nephews or nieces who look up to you? How does your being inside affect them? When you're home again, what will you tell them about your experiences?

Day Dreaming In My Room

When I'm in my room, I be day dreaming about being home and going to school. Sometimes, I day dream about what would life be like if I never joined a gang. I probably be at home with my girl ain't tripping off shhh.

Sometimes, when I'm in my room, I day dream about being in Mexico on one of those beaches where you could see through the water and see fish. But this is the life I chose and this is the life I love.

-Menace

From The Beat: No Menace, you didn't choose this life. This life chose you. Children don't really make choices because they don't have enough information to know what is available to choose from. But you aren't a child any more, so now the choices you make are your responsibility to live with. When you say you "love this life," does that include sleeping in a room with the commode next to your bed? Does it include taking orders from strangers who don't really care about you? Does it include watching life pass you by from inside four thick walls and behind razor ribbon? Because all those things are a part of the life you love...

Day Dreamin'

Sittin' in my cell
Bored as hell
Day dreamin' 'bout you
Can't wait to get out
Without a doubt
So I can make love
And play wit' you!
I dream about you
Day and night
Can't wait for day
I can be called yo' wife!

-Foxy

From The Beat: Well, we understand why your mind would wander to memories of love, and dreams of love for the future. But we want to remind you that unless you also start thinking about the changes you need to make in order to stay out of places like this (and worse), you will only find yourself back in a box writing sad love poems to someone not there. A word to the wise...



My Baby Girl

My big hit would probably be a month ago. I was in the hall for bout a week and I got a letter sayin' I'm having a baby girl. I didn't know I was going to have a baby especially when the girl can't get a abortion, because she's six months pregnant. So I decided to change my life around so I can support my girl and my baby. I have decided to start doing good and to try to go somewhere wit my life. When my parents come to visit me they always tell me they're gonna be there for me, and they will help me support the baby.

To me this is going to be very hard to do but I'm gonna do it for real. I'm really going to support my baby, because I'm not going to be one of those dads that leave the girl and baby because they don't want it or they ain't ready. I'ma do whatever I have to do to help them. It hurts me a lot because the baby is due September 6th and I'm either going to be in the hall or Camp Sweeney.

I'm hoping I'll be at Camp Sweeney so if I'm doing good maybe they will let me go see my baby being born. This is my big hit because this is telling me that I have to change my life fast and be ready to become a father to someone.

-Kilo

From The Beat: Sure, this is as big a hit as we can imagine. You're going to be a father! Of a baby girl! It sounds as if you have support from your family, and also as if you've made the decision to step up and take care of her. Congratulations - and we hope you keep writing about your new plans, your new future, your new leaf!

Facing The Facts

I have only been here for two days and I start feeling helpless when I start thinking about how I messed up, and my family and my girlfriend. I feel helpless because I got so many things taken away from me, including my dad's car, his trust, my house, and all my belongings.

I wonder what my family and friends are doing right now. Are they even thinking about me? Do I cross their mind? And last of all, my girlfriend, she doesn't even know that I'm locked up. I didn't even get to tell her what's going on. She probably thinks that I don't want to talk to her anymore. What I do when I'm feeling helpless is I get on my knees and pray to God to help me to get out of this hole that I'm in. But I needed this to realize what I'm doing wrong and how I'm going to improve it.

-Arnulfo

From The Beat: You have a long road ahead of you when you get out. A lot of trust to rebuild. The important thing is to do the self-questioning and hard thinking that you are doing now. By seeking answers within yourself and from God, you can make a plan for your life after juvenile hall. That feeling of helplessness will go away when you have the opportunity to regain the real trust of your family, your girlfriend, and yourself. Part of this will be working to help replace the belongings (especially your dad's) that were taken away because of your actions. It will be hard, but it's the only way.

Locked Up

Locked up in here is stressful

Can't see my mom or my little sister and little brother but locked here has me thinking about what I was doing wrong

how I was hurting people

I regret what I was doing out there

I miss all my family

I can't want to get out and see my girl and just give her a hug

-Lil' Tez

From The Beat: So you realize what you were doing was wrong. You realize you hurt plenty of people, including family, so what must you do and can you do it to stay out of here?

What is it?

What do we all adore
It's somethin' worth dying for.
It's been nothing but pain
Stuck in the fame
Searching for fortune and fame

-Dedo

From The Beat: You are so right, that mad pursuit for fortune and fame brings nothing but tears. Maybe the question isn't what would you die for, but what would you live for. Dedo, what would you live for?

Beat Withinterview: LUIS

TBW: How was your week?

Luis: So far it's been the same as every week but on Saturday we will be having a barbecue

TBW: Any visits from family?

Luis: Yeah, my parents visit me on the weekends and they brought me a bunch of snacks.

TBW: Made any decisions about where you're going after your release?

Luis: No not yet but I'm definitely going to get something good to eat, maybe at a restaurant.

TBW: Yeah, Good food is something you miss in here. Remind us, what are your long-term plans.

Luis: Well, hopefully when I get out I'm a get my GED, and then find me a job so I could start helping my mom out with money.

Do you have a GED study book? No, not yet but once I get one, I'm going to start studying, so I could get that over with.

TBW: We'll bring one next week. Any preferences?

Luis: no, I don't.

TBW: Are you better at math or verbal

Luis: I'm better at Math

TBW: We know you read a lot. What books have you read recently?

What's your favorite book? Why?

Luis: Actually I don't read a lot but the most recent book I read is called From Death to Forgiveness. I don't have a favorite book neither.

-Luis

From The Beat: You handled yourself like a pro during this interview, with interesting answers to all the questions. We're looking forward to finding out more about your plans and struggles and dreams!

Many Questions

Questions so much easier to come up with than answers

I do what I do no one holds me by ransom

I seldom feel helpless but my face is a mug

I turn it up side down with a female hug

time heals all wounds but its also precious

strength gets you a long way only if you flex it

now I sit hear sing and wearing the county blues

tryin' to find the right path with not too many clues

foolish like a stooge but full of info like the news

can I trust and love myself or can I choose you

-Choose One

From The Beat: Nice little flow, but in the end it must be your actions that speak for you. Your actions hopefully will be well thought out too. AS for choosing the right path, you can find that path too. It's not hard, but it does take courage.

No Pity

Since Rell died it seem we been livin' in hell

Where I am from we ain't scared to bleed

We out here takin' 'cause ain't nobody given, no pity

In my city ninjas dying over \$100's and \$50's

If there's a God where is He?

Bodies droppin younger and younger

We motivated by hunger

Some ninjas plottin on my head

So I stay on the under

-Lil' Water

From The Beat: Oh Walter, the life you attempted to write is so horrible. So, what will you do to get away from this? OR will you surrender to this life and let the chips fall as they may? Please tell us you are strong enough to live a healthy safe life!

Why Do I Do What I (Use) To Do?

I use to get hella money buying hella cars on rims, 'cause I wasn't paying attention to what anyone told me to, and I was doing so much shhh, that's why I'm here right now for doing some hot shhh and now I really see that I should have kept going to school while I was out so now I know what to do when I get out to stay out of here that's why I use to do what I do!

-Lil' Rome

From The Beat: So that's why you did what you did, but now is that phase of your life over? Are you going to do differently from now on, and if so, what will you do, when you do what you now plan to do?

I Feel Helpless 'Cause I'm Helpless!

I feel helpless just being in here, 'cause I can't help my brothers on the outs. I feel helpless because I know if I was on the outs fo' sure can do a lot to help the situation.

Another thing I feel helpless about is my mom being pregnant and having her baby I wasn't there to take care of her. I feel helpless because I can't give my girlfriend what she deserves, but I'm thankful that she feels like she got my heart. I feel helpless 'cause the system got me by the balls and this stuff hard, because I don't know what to do but shake my evil thoughts. I feel helpless 'cause I am helpless.

-Lil' Tonio

From The Beat: The best thing you can do for your mom is stay on the level while you're in here, and keep learning (vocabulary, writing skills, math). Stay on the path you put yourself on, the system has got you, for now. But it doesn't have your mind, or your heart, or your dreams, and remember the case you almost caught... you're helping yourself each day you wake up positive and get to work!

This New Facility

I think the new faculty is coo' but they can improve on the gut removing food. I would like it we had a big court yard and the food we had at the old hall. I think this hall has something better than the old hall, but the old hall had a bigger courtyard and better food.

The new hall has nice rooms but everything else is messed up. Oh, and the old hall had contact visits ... Contact visits are better because you can hug your mom or dad and feel them better and you don't have to be so close to another person. My last visit was nice because I seen some of my family members, but it was messed up because I see and talk to them through a glass window.

I don't like the fact that my dad has to see and talk to me through a glass window.

-Ryan

From The Beat: We bet you'd never be missing the food they served in the old hall, huh? Thanks for writing down your thoughts and impressions of this new facility. It's important that people learn what these halls look like to young people like you, the ones who have to live in them, and you did a good job describing it, both on the levels of what it looks like and on how it makes you feel. Peace. We hope you are with your family soon, no glass windows involved!

My Life Of Felonies

Why I started to commit felonies I don't know, I guess because my father was killed six days after I was born. I had a lot of animosity in me and I got tired of asking my mom for anything, so the felonies I committed, selling drugs and doing other things.

-Daniel

From The Beat: Wow, that makes complete sense. It actually seems like you have a pretty good idea of why things in your life went the way they did—that's an important step to changing the course of the rest of your life, if that's what you want. You're obviously a very intelligent, thoughtful person—what are you going to do with it?

Solo

I do what I do 'cause I'm solo on this earth. All I have is me, myself and I. Don't get me wrong. I have family, but they don't care for me. But it's good though, I'm gonna make it, man I do what I do 'cause people be messin' with me, and what I mean by that is the police, judge, my mama.

-Da President

From The Beat: Now that you have a baby on the way though, you're not alone on this earth and you never will be again. You're not solo anymore. Does that change how you feel? And will it change what you do?

It's All Bad

I don't know what to do when everything is all bad, 'cause it's so bad all I can do is cry and hope everything gets all better with me and my mom. Bad stuff always happens too, when I try to do good. So I don't know what to do next. I don't get no visits in here, so that's bad. What's next. I won't get no phone calls?

I get letters, but that don't work form me. Like my mom told me, what goes around comes around two times harder. I don't know what to do when my mom is out there stressin' and me I'm in here goin' bad on staff and stuff like that. It seems like whatever I do, I can't stay good. I always have to do bad in here or out there.

-Alex

From The Beat: Have you had any anger management classes in there, with suggestions for how to hold your temper in? Because it seems to us that you have a HUGE heart, and every reason in the world to keep trying. It shows in your writing and in the way you handle yourself in workshop. So since you love writing, why don't you break it down, number by number, and tell The Beat what happens to make you "go bad"

RIP Boonie

What's up Boonie? I'm still in the hall, bra'.

Ninja I was just rapping your stuff not too long ago, and then I made a phone call

and my lil' brother said Lil' Dirty, Boonie gone. I said which Boonie

and he told me which one

I was like "who killed him?" and he said the pizza man.... and for you ninjas who don't know Boonie brah, my ninja was real grimy.

Boonie don't forget that I still love you and you still in my memory ninja. We used to go on one every night, blowin' hella weed and gettin' hella drunk, and we was eatin'. I still remember when you gave that ninja grandpa the business, and I'm gonna pop a pill for you and yo' memories.

-Lil' Dirty

From The Beat: We're sorry to hear of another lost person in your life...you've had too many already, and seen too much. The worst part is that you sound as if you are still stuck in the deathtrap that caught Boonie - there are so many other ways to honor him besides "popping a pill" [Just think how many people in Oakland have already died or gotten sent to jail because of things that happened when they were off pills]. What about doing something for someone in his family? Or writing a rap dedicated to him? Or, even better, asking yourself if there is anything you could learn from his death?

I Don't Know No Better

I do what I do because I don't know no better. I feel I know how to grind better than I do anything out here. That's all you got to know how to do is grind. I feel like if you don't got no money, you ain't gon' get no life.

They ask us why we stunt so hard. Because we only live once. You see us on twenty-twos and twenty-nines and then ninjas want to hate. But yeah all I could say is we don't die, we live on.

-Lil' G

From The Beat: If you don't know better - that means it's time to learn better. It makes sense, if you believe that grinding is your only option, then that's what you're going to do. But what if you went to the mayor's office (they have a department for youth employment) and applied for a job with

Feelin' helpless: RIP Turo

Well Beat, I got a homie that got shot last year. His name is Arturo. I grew up with him and he was like my brother... we kicked it all the time when I first got the call that he got shot, the first thing I wanted to do was get revenge, but all that would do is make it worse.

So all I could do was ask the judge for a TR. But all he did was say no. So all I could do was write and wait till I got out. To this day he is still remembered. He may not be here with us but he is still in our hearts, and always will be. Beat I am out until next week.

-Ryan

From The Beat: Life and death go on, even when we're locked up thinking time stands still. It's terrible to think of someone so close to you being shot... and even worse to think it happened while you were locked up, and couldn't be with your family and friends to comfort each other. On the other hand, maybe it's a blessing in disguise that you were locked up. Do you think that if you'd been out, you might have acted on that first impulse for revenge, and potentially there might have been another funeral: Yours? Now you have time to think about Arturo, to feel sad about his loss, to miss him, and, we hope, to think of a positive way to honor his memory. What would that positive way look like?

To My Bra That's Gone!

'Sup Marcus bra, I'm just writin' to pay respect. We lost you even though God granted you wit' plenty of chances.

But this time he said it was time for you can come home. We did your dirty work and all, but now he's like, what could a ninja do when he lost somebody and they had so many vivid memories.

And when he think about calling you to say "Bra, remember when we...?"

But now you gone, so all I can do is talk to you in prayer.

RIP Darkus Marcus

-Domo

From The Beat: We're sorry for your loss...you too have been granted with many chances, are you taking them as warnings. When we talk to you, it's like we're praying too. Praying that you'll get out of the game and off the streets, praying that one day you'll look back on all these mistakes you made and time you served, and realize that it was something that made you change your life. In this case, you are the one who can answer that prayer. Are you going to?

Feeling Helpless

I'm just tired of feeling helpless, sitting in a dorm full of ninjas. Feelin' helpless waiting on my homie, and watching other ninjas leaving, and me just staying here bored as ever.

Feeling helpless about how I got caught instead of getting away. Just feeling helpless period.

-Ray Ray

From The Beat: The good news – and we hope this makes you feel better, is that you really aren't helpless. There's a lot you can't control, like where you are right now, or where you live, or what kind of drama plays out at home or on the street where you live, and go to school. But there's a lot you CAN control too, like how hard you study, whether you join a positive program on the outs (Like Youth Radio in Berkeley, The Mentoring Group in downtown Oakland, Youth Movement Records on King, any local chapter of Omega Boys' Club, etc...) And you can control how hard you study at school, you can control whether you blow money on expensive sneakers or save it to pay for classes, you can control who you hang out with.... you actually aren't helpless at all. So make a list, for The Beat, for yourself – of what you CAN control.

Personal Concern

In this day and age my personal concern is to leave juvenile hall and get my life together.

-Quintor

From The Beat: That is a personal concern. And once you leave, then what?

How Do It Feel

When you are all alone
Sitting in a jail cell
When you should be with your child
How do it feel
being in jail
not knowing the next move
that's going to be made
How do it feel
having to have
your lil' infant
come visit you in jail
How do it feel
I tell you how it feels
It hurts to be away from my child
When I should be home
Now I'm wondering what's going on
with my son.

-Lil' Mesh Mesh

From The Beat: You know, if everyone had to try and put themselves in another's shoes to feel the way they feel, the world would probably be a much different, more compassionate place. We can't say we know how you feel, but after reading this clear and powerful poem, we definitely got a taste of it, and of the pain you must be going through. You have a strong voice, and you should continue to use it! In the meantime, for your next poem, tell us about the life you are planning on building for you and your son!

Not Gon' Give Up

Man I tried so hard but I failed again. But I am not going to stop trying I have done a lot in life that I regret but all I can do is try again, until I get it right.

I have tried and tried but I failed, but I am not going to stop. Successful in life so I don't have to end up coming back but this time is the last. And that is fo' sho I ain't comin' back to this new hall. The food is nasty and you don't come out your room that much any more so that is why I'm going to be successful in life.

-Ryan

From The Beat: We admire your determination – it's never a failure to fail. The failure comes when people are afraid to get back up. Maybe it would help if you looked back at the times you've fallen. What was it you tripped over. Was it the same mistake each time? And what did those mistakes look like

Change

Guns poppin' off
Ninjas is gettin' gassed up.
Ninjas dressed in all black
Ninjas is all mask up
This is the life of a beast
The life of a youngsta on the streets
I gotta change my ways
'Cause I ain't tryna get put on a white tee

-Lil' Bill

From The Beat: We don't wanna see you on a white tee either – we'd much rather see you on a podium, standing to get your degree, or depositing a fat first paycheck in the bank to open your own account, or on a stage, acting in a Broadway show. So yeah – changing your ways is the way to go. What are some of the things you'd need to change?

RIP Cousin Glen

When I'm in my room I think of Cousin Glen. He been dead for four years, but he go hard man. I wish he was here right now bra. We miss you bra, we is mobbin' to the end. But this is over.

- Lil' Rell

From The Beat: We had to cut your other pieces, Lil Rell, because they were just too loaded with negativity and drugs and street glory. When you think of all the people you've lost to street violence – either because they're dead now, or they've been sent to jail, doesn't that make you wonder about your life?

RIP

When you got hit with that twenty-two
I looked at you
a tear came out of my eye
I stay up and pray for you
only if I didn't do what I did you would still be here
RIP to you
always
I will take good care of mom
watch over me and moms.

-Lil' Guis

From The Beat: We're so sorry for what happened to your brother. Does the fact that he was the victim of gun violence make you feel any different about street life? We see so many young people who deal with bullets and drugs on a daily basis and it makes us wonder what it's all for. And some people just don't take it seriously...

The New Hall

The new hall is way more better than the old hall. The new one has better windows and more space in the rooms. In the old hall there were ants coming out of my sink and the toilet was all bad. The old hall was hecka nasty and messed up. I'm glad we had a new Juvenile Hall but we should have used that money on something more useful. Why spend all that money on some criminals when they could give it to the poor.

-Renzo

From The Beat: You bring up a good point, and it's something a lot of people have been talking about for a while—why is it that the United States spends so very much money building new prisons and juvenile halls, when what we really need to spend money on are things like education and health care, to name just a couple. Do you think these kinds of decisions represent the priorities of most U.S. citizens, or do you think our government has gotten away from us?

Why Do I do What I Do

Why I do what I do is because in Oakland there is much violence. Every day, you live around violence. Well, of course you're going to be involved in it. In this age, my personal concern is getting shot. My life might end, that's my major concern.

-Unknown

From The Beat: There are young people who are living in Oakland and not getting involved in violence. It may seem incredibly difficult, and it is, for some kids, but there really is another way. You have every right in the world to feel fearful about getting shot, especially if there is a lot of gun violence in your neighborhood. However, YOU have the choice to avoid dangerous situations and dangerous people. You can stop "doing what you do" that leads to violence. Think it's impossible? Come down to the Beat in downtown S.F. when you get out. You'll meet some people who did it.

Doing What I Do

I do what I do 'cause I need to stay alive and 'cause I love the feeling of that high and drunkness. I do it for fun. I do it to fit in. I do it to show I ain't no weak ninja that I can do what anyone can do. Or I just do what the hell I want 'cause I'm the boss and if I can't I'll find another way to do it.

Sometimes I don't think when I do anything cause I be too drunk to think. I got to do what I can to the fullest before I die, I want my name to be in the history book I want to leave a mark on this earth.

-Tafuna

From The Beat: What kind of mark does a person leave when they're drunk all the time and don't think when they're doing things? There are plenty of addicts out there, and the sad thing is that addiction is only memorable in the most painful way—so if you're looking to leave a positive legacy you might want to rethink your path. Also, fitting in isn't worth ruining your life, and doing something just to show you're not weak is actually one of the weakest things you can do, so be strong and do your own thing.

Flip The Script

I flip the script, from a crook to readin' books,
Used to fuss over every illegal buck.
No more fights, now I write for the mic
'Cause you were the one who changed my life
The girl I loved was you
But our love was too good to be true
And the times we spent together
Are now gone forever
You're like an angel sent from above
I thought I liked you
But you made me fall in love

-Jrc

From The Beat: The true angel that will change you around, is the angel inside you... that's the part of you that wants to change, the part of you that works to create great things (like your poems) the part of you that wants a good life for himself, with real dreams to look forward to and plans to make. All you need to do is let that angel do his work!

Where Did The Block Get Me

The block got me locked up in Juvi,
now I'm going to a group home for 9 months
I just can't blame the block because it take two
but it's my fault too for trying to be on the block like
everybody else.
So that's why I can't be like everybody else
so I am going to be different from all the others.

-Lil' Chill

From The Beat: In what ways do you want to be different? Probably the most difficult and rewarding thing you could do would be to just think for yourself. People say this all the time, but it's really much harder than it sounds. We have so many outside forces pulling us in different directions that sometimes it's hard to even know what we truly think. Being authentic and real means getting to know yourself and then honoring that self, because in the end, what else is there?

Run From Camp!

I feel helpless because of the position I'm in. I've been here in camp for over a month and I have seven more to do, and I've been locked up for over two months.

So when all the staff and people say if you do good you get out in five and a half months, it's not true. So the right thing is not to run.

Just do your program so you can try and get out the system. Cause if you run, it's just gonna be longer until you get out. But maybe you should run, but I wouldn't

-Jrc

From The Beat: There's nothing here that we would add to this. Except one thing – while you're in camp... take advantage of every program they offer... if you're going to lose your freedom, you may as well gain as much knowledge as you can!

Being In Juvenile Hall

Being in jail is boosie because my best friend got murdered the second day I was here, and I couldn't make it to the funeral, and that hella hurt my heart. It made me think different about life. I would've never been in if the person I was with never told me to pull off when the police was already right behind us, and then jump out the car when I was still driving and then when I jump out tell the police which way I went, then wanna run and jump in a car and pass me up when I was still running. When I could've jumped in went to my girl house, went home took a shower and went back to the hood and helped my uncle out at his store and my friend probably still would be here.

-Minneer

From The Beat: It's so tragic that you lost your best friend to violence. What do you think it will take to change things? It's obvious that the lure and power of the game is strong enough to make smart people do dumb things, and what we want to know is, how are you changed? What makes you so sure that the next time you're in some trouble with a friend you're not going to listen to bad advice and get yourself locked up or worse?

Feeling Helpless

I'm feeling helpless right now to know that my great-grandmother is lying in her hospital bed and could probably go at any minute, and there's nothing I can do to comfort her in her time of discomfort. Knowing that she probably is waiting for me to come in and sit with her and have a conversation about her getting better, even though it's a strong possibility that she might not, but to know that there's a fighting chance that she might beat whatever sickness she's going through, makes me want to see my granny much more.

Then there's the downside that she might go and I didn't even get to say my goodbyes to tell her how much I love her. It makes me want to go crazy but I got to stay strong for her. And just keep praying to God to not take her cause I'm not ready to let her go. But I have a feeling that if I stay strong then so will she.

That is all I have to say for now. But I'm about to wiggle so I'll holla.

-B

From The Beat: We are so very sorry to hear about your great-grandmother. It must be so painful to be locked up at a time like this. Our thoughts and prayers are with you and your family at this difficult time. And you're right: the best thing you can do is to stay strong. When you stay strong, you honor your great-grandmother, and yourself.

Influence

When I get out I'm gonna change my life around and continue to go to school and go see my girlfriend. When my friends try to influence me to do bad, like smoke and rob people, I'ma think twice and go to somethin' else, because every time I'm with my friends, I make a mistake.

-Jesse

From The Beat: First off, congratulations on starting to make a change. And we're glad you have a girlfriend who brings out the best in you. Do you have any friends that are positive influences on you, and try to get you to do well?

My Personal Concern Is Family

In this day in age my personal concern is my brother and my mother's health, and perfection in the streets because I lost too many friends and family members and friends that were close to me.

If I lose either my mother or my brother I will not know what to do. When I grew up I didn't have a daddy so it was just me and my mom and big brother. My brother took care of me, so did my mother, but it was hard for my mother 'cause she had to raise two boys all on her own. My mother worked hard to put meals on the table every night.

When I got to the age I can witness the challenges she went through, me and my brother said it ain't right, so we started getting out in to the world making our own money so she wouldn't have to work as hard.

For a minute my brother was making reasonable money but my mother was worried 'cause we both didn't have a real job. That's when my mother had a boyfriend, and me and my brother was cool with him too, he made a cool amount of money, so then me and my brother start goin' dumb we got out more used our money on things other than food and stuff for the house, that's when I started getting in trouble.

-Darnell

From The Beat: The best part of this piece is your honesty about the life that has brought you here. Now be honest with yourself are you ready to leave the old habits and live a life that makes mom proud? What is your plan upon leaving the hall?

The Truth

Why am I so hard
why can't I just be the real me
if you could look inside my heart
maybe you could feel me
I done so much wrong

Shhh, I don't think I could turn around
but if you look in my soul it would take away your frown
don't look at my dreads or my caramel complexion skin
just look in my heart and listen to the beat within me.

-Jesus Coleone

From The Beat: And what does the beat within you say? Who is the real Jesus Coleone?

If I Had One Wish

People away askin' me, what would you do if you had one wish?

I just stop and look at them then I think to myself is you slow,

then I ask them, what would you wish for?

They go on and on 'bout what they wish would be, talking 'bout they wish they had this much money and stuff like that,

but what I would wish for is to see God and just talk to Him in person....

Guess what! It ain't happening.

It really did but only in my dream.

Yes I was dreamin' so you better wake up 'cause wishes really don't come true only in dreams.

-Marcus

From The Beat: Unless you work toward your dreams and wishes. Maybe instead of wishing things and expecting some magic force to grant them, we should wish for things we have control over and them grant them ourselves. Just a thought.

Feeling Helpless

Every day while I'm incarcerated

I feel helpless

When I get room time

I feel helpless

When I get put in handcuffs

I feel helpless

But when I get out

I'm a be stress less

-Li'l' Bill

From The Beat: It's gonna feel good to be a free man, to not have someone telling you where to go and when, or using handcuffs and locked doors to control you. However, there are lots of stresses on the outs. Just ask anyone who's holding down a job or two, raising kids, or trying to stay out of the game and out of trouble! But those are stresses that you can manage if you're highly motivated to never see those handcuffs and cell walls again. Do yourself a favor, and remember your poem after your release!

Why Do You Do What You Do

As a youngster I was influenced by a highly profitable life as a drug distributor. AS a young teen I was running with a group of Jamaicans that robbed other drug dealers.

One of my friends got shot at the age of sixteen, and shortly after I moved to another country named Belize. Belize Is a major point of entry for drugs being brought into Mexico. I got caught up with more drugs until I moved.

-Old Life

From The Beat: Wow! You have an interesting and international life story, although one with a lot of violence at a young age. What caused you (and your family?) to move back to the States? What do you think about the effects of the drug trade between Belize, Mexico, and the U.S. Who benefits? Who loses? Getting back to you and your story, do you think that you will be able to quit the drug game when you get out of the Hall? We would like to hear more from you about your thoughts on the future.

Hey Mama

I can tell the look in your eyes
You try to hide it by disguise
But you got to know one thing
I'm on the grind tryin' to make it to the top
(And guess what?)
I did it for you
Because I love you

Hey Mama

I told you to know yo son was gon get these dolla's
Get you away from the drama
And send you to the Bahamas
It's nothin' 'cause I gotta give back to my elders
You helped me when I was down
So mama, now I gotta help you
I was locked up, you came to visit
And when I hit the block
I know I put you through it
Pushin' that, hittin' them licks
Trying to stack my chips
I promise it was all for something
Or should I say someone
The mother of this son
She brought life to these lungs
A special love one
Yeah that special woman
Yeah I'm talkin' to you
The one that gives me her love
This one for my mama

Hey ma, how you doin' this yo son
I know you not proud of a lot that I've done
I know you wish me better, yeah I know that
Now this the moment of the year, call it a Kodak
Want you to know that I made it to the top
Ninja's tried to hate but the grind never stop
You was worried about ya boy in them streets
Now I'm on the mic makin' a killin' on these beats
Yo' baby boy grown up now
I made it through the struggle
I hope I made you proud
I see that look in yo' eyes
I'm sorry for them times I made you cry
And I ask God why
I can't even lie
All them nights I was gone I was chasing paypa
But now I gotta better way to thank ya.

-The Kid

From The Beat: We're glad you are alive and that you will be home one day to show your mom that you can live on the streets and in her home without jeopardizing your life. WE know your mom does not want to see her baby boy selling dope, making fast money, and putting his freedom on the line, so stop! If it's through music or what ever, it's gonna take hard work! Stay focus and do it, for you, for her!

Makes Me Mad

I feel helpless when I talk to my family on the phone, because I can't be out there with them. I can't see my little brothers grow. Makes me mad every time I think about not seein' them grow up. Miss their birthdays. My biggest concern is when I'm going to get out to be back with my family.

-Cisco

From The Beat: We're sorry you're missing your brothers grow up, and we can understand why that would make you mad. But when those little boys grow up without a big brother role model, who should they be mad at? Of course you're thinking about when you'll be back with your family, so take it to the next step. Think about what you must change to be able to stay free, and be the big brother they need.

Helpless Helpless

What's good Beat? Well, as for me, I'm not doing so good. It's been about a year since I was last here!! Well, today's topic is feeling helpless. Well Beat, I'm feeling helpless because of the fact that I'm incarcerated because of my old friends from the past, that I used to chill with, have lied about me and said I committed a crime that I didn't commit!

Well, what I'm trying to say is I feel helpless because I'm back in here for someone else's crime. Damn Beat, I changed my whole life around the last time I got out, because the last time I was here I missed out on a lot of things. And I've seen how it affected my loved ones. Especially my mom, bro and sis because at one time my mom was proud of me, 'cause she thought I was a good kid. But in reality, I was living a double life!!

On one hand I was doing things to make my mom happy, and on the other hand I was out on the street doing my own thing. My bro and sis looked at that and wanted to do what I was doing. So they followed in my steps and started doing their own things!! By the time I knew it, all three of us were doing what we wanted to do.

Well Beat, that's why I turned my life around the last time I got out. So that I could see my mom happy once again!! Instead of seeing her in pain all the time!!

You know Beat, I'm feeling helpless because I turned my life around and now I'm back in here because of other people!! Don't get me wrong, if I was here for something I did and not for something I didn't do - I would man up to it and do the time!!

Well Beat, that's what I got to say on today's topic.

-Richard

From The Beat: Unfortunately things happened the way they did. What can you do for yourself now? YOU know the saying, "the truth shall set you free." Well, we hope in the end that the justice system sees the truth in your case and makes the right decision. Until then, maintain the faith, as you continue to teach others that there is a better road to be on. Remember, you're still in a position to keep your mom happy and show your bro and sis steps to success! Allow yourself the opportunity to learn from that unfortunate circumstance and then move forward without dwelling on the past. You may be helpless of the situation you're in, but you are in control of yourself and your future! Keep that in mind! Stay in touch Richard!

Anger Within

What I do with the pain and anger of being misunderstood is I just hold that inside until it builds up and I can't handle it. Flash on someone or something. But in the end forget 'em, all I need are my friends and my family. Everyone's human, we all have flaws. People don't understand me 'cause I don't wanna walk in everyone else's steps just to be cool. Everything I do is for me alone, not anyone else. I ain't no one henchmen.

-Los

From The Beat: You are a human being! Now be a productive person in society! You sound like a person, a young leader, who can get his life together and conduct a life free of incarceration. Do it!

My Concern

It's hard for me right now, because hardly anybody knows about my biggest secret! I think it's time for people to know and for me to take some advice.

I'm pregnant but very few people know. I found out the day I came in! It's hard being in here and going through this shhh!

Everyday the girls ask me what's wrong, but I have to act like nothing's bugging me. I had an OT for my first appointment, but the thing that sucks is that I couldn't have my man with me! And trip out. The very first thing I wanted to do when I found out was to have an abortion. Now I had a picture of my babe and a second thought come to my head! I don't know what to do.

-Jose's Girl

From The Beat: Go with the flow of your heart? Search within yourself if you really want this babe or not. You also need to know what your responsibility will be if you had this babe. Having a babe is the most beautiful experience a woman can have, but it also comes with a lot of stress, dedication and responsibilities. It's your choice!

What's On My Mind

Q-vole Beat? It's your girl Smokey hitting you up from this unit again. I'm a write what's on my mind today. Hella shhh is on my mind like, what's my dad doing? Or like when is my sister gonna stop being stubborn? And when I'm I gonna stop doing all the shhh that I do, so I can support my daughter?

I just wonder when I do get out if my daughter is even gonna remember me. If she doesn't, it's not her fault, but my 'cause I won't stop doing these foolish things that get me locked up.

I just wish my sister would listen to me and stop being a big mouth to staff, so me and her can hurry and go to a group home already. But I love her and I understand that she's still young and wanna still do those things she does.

The only is for me to do is to straighten my act and be a good role model for her. It's kind a hard, but I'm doing it right now and it seems like she doesn't give a damn about her life. That hurts me and makes me sad, but I know we'll pull through this.

Besides, I'm concern for my boy Nolan. I haven't seen him for a minute, but I'm hoping he too will stay out of here and get it together. I care for him and I'm still here for him. I wish I can tell him now how much I care for him and miss him, but wherever you are Nolan please, know I love you. Alrato.

-S

From The Beat: How can you try to help her out if you haven't helped yourself out? If you want to be a good role model, you would have to be a different person, and help her out while both of you are out. It's time to stop all this mess that have gotten you away from the little creature who awaits for you on the outs. Having a babe is a big responsibility. Don't take away the right to grow up with a mother on her side. In some point in your life, you needed a mother as she might be missing you. Don't make her wait. She's waiting! We know you can make everything you got in your mind a reality, just put your heart into it and make happen. You can do it! You have lives counting on you. What's it going to be?

My Hall Time

Well why am here? It was a normal day. I was just chillin', and drinking with my homies. We were walking down the street when a crazy idea popped in my head.

I wanted a cell phone, so the person I saw, I was going to jack them, so I did and like thirty minutes later, I was running from the cops. I thought I got away, but I was wrong. As soon as I stopped running a cop come out of nowhere, and had a gun pointed at me, so he took to the Morgan Hill Police Station.

After that, they took me to the hall.

My 1st night there was the longest night of my life, but after five days, I went to court and they told me what I was charged for. They got me for a 211. Funny, I was drinking 211 and got a 211, which is a strike when you're sixteen. I'm only 15, so I got lucky.

When I got back from court, I was mad 'cause I wanted to get out. The homies in the unit were like your hella lucky, 'cause my other homie got seven years in YA.

Then I thought to myself that I have no right to be mad about this.

So all you out there doing hall time or going to the Ranch, stop crying, stay up and keep your head up!

-Tuna

From The Beat: You got lucky! But don't take it from granted. If life has given you another chance, don't dump it into the garbage can. Like your homie said, there are others who were not as lucky as you. How do you feel about all this? What did you learn from this experience? We hope this time out has helped you reflect on the things you were doing. Lastly, keep your hands off of things that do not belong to you. Stop violating other innocent people. You'd be pissed if what you did happened to your family, say your mother!

My Concern

Hey Beat, well it's unfortunate that I'm writing in here again, but I'm back.

My concern is that I will prove everyone right in being a failure and end up going to Chowchilla. The DA said I'm a drug addict who hurts people. That's not even me at all.

They look at my past and make that who I am today when I changed. I guess I'm just going to have to work that much harder to prove them wrong.

I turn 18 in the middle of July. I was suppose to leave for boot camp July 23rd. My Dad's B-day is May 8th. I'm going to be in a facility for all of these important dates and no longer a part of a Marine Corps.

Like I said before, my concern is for my sister. She is following my footsteps and I don't know how to convey the message that the path I chose is wrong to her.

She's getting in fights like I used to all the time now, just because she knows she will win. I'm just afraid for her life because she has a mouth-piece and she might piss off the wrong person and end up dead. I can't lead by example anymore so if everyone would pray for Alyssa, it would mean a lot. Until pencil meets paper.

-That One Girl

From The Beat: Well you will have the opportunity to prove them wrong and help your sister out of this road she's been walking. Before you can help her out, you would have to help yourself out first. There's no way you can help her out while being in here or being in the mess you were before. When we are young, we learn from those we look up to, and we try to copy what they do, what they say and how they act. This is what's happening to your sister. If you really care for her, be a leader, a good leader and show her the right way. Can you do that to save your life and your sister's life?

Not Just A Stupid Fling

One day you will see
All this pain and misery
What you could have had
Now is gone but don't be mad
For you lost your one true love
That was sent from up above
I truly thought that we would last
Now is the future and you're my past
You left me and you said "good bye"
How could you just let us die?
The love I thought we had was true
Now you're gone and we are through
Some day you will come to find
That life is love and love is blind
So with that said just know one thing
It was not just a stupid fling.

-Rudy

From The Beat: If it's over, it's over. Now you have to move on with your life and focus on your future and how to maintain yourself out of this place. Life goes on, and you must move on as well. Good luck!

Unmarked Graves

There's an unmarked grave with my family that I care about. I wish they were here. I feel like I was left alone with nothing to lose. Thinking of those unmarked graves makes me think, if they wanted to see me like this.

I wish my family were here to help me stay away from drugs and not make me think so much about them. I use drugs to make me forget, but now that I've been clean for two months, I want to remember the good times we had. I'll never forget those unmarked graves.

-Albert

From The Beat: You chosen the wrong thing to cure your pain and to forget about your problems. The only thing that drugs can offer you is a destructive life full of sadness, stress and failure. There are programs that can help you with your addictions to drugs and your problems with your depression. If you can't put an end to this mess by yourself, we suggest you look for professional help. It helps and it can make a big difference in your life.

A Story To Tell

Walking down the street, realizing how I'm going to pay
 the rent
 knowing I don't have enough money it's already spent
 I can't sell dope for long
 things running through my head of bad things that are
 wrong
 walking, selling dope down the street
 walk into a mini-market
 to grab something to eat
 getting drunk and high all day
 walk out the store forgetting to pay
 he said stop and I turned around
 I'm mad and drunk
 so I turn my smile to a frown
 so I throw everything on the corner to the floor
 having no money to pay the rent I'm poor
 I tell him to open the cash register
 so I can get some money
 nothing at this point is funny
 someone walked in, so I run
 went home
 running all day wasn't fun
 cops come with tazor guns out
 no way to run no other route
 doing bad stuff to pay the rent
 breaking the laws
 wake up the next day behind brick walls.

-Trevino

From The Beat: Is this the reason why you're here? How do you feel now when facing the consequence? Was it worth it? Of course not. You shared with us how you got in here, but we would love to know if you regret doing what you did or not? What are your feelings towards this incident? What do you regret? And what's the plan when you get out to pay the rent?

Will She Be There

On the outside, I like this girl. She probably doesn't know I do. I think she does. Everyday locked up is another day. She could be talking to another man. I sit awake at night in my cell thinking about what she's doing and if she's talking to other guys.

I have to realize that being locked up was my fault. If she gets with another man, I would be disappointed in myself.

God has a plan and if we're meant to be together then it'll happen. I guess you could say I have no means of communication. She definitely doesn't know where I am. It's the last place I want to be. I don't get mad thinking about her, but deep down I get disappointed in my actions and the reasons I'm here.

-Aj

From The Beat: It's your fault. But, it might not be too late. What are you willing to do for her? Wait, what are you willing to do for yourself?? If you had the chance to get out, would you stay out for her? What would your plan be?

This Is What I Do

Hmmmm...The things that I do are basically the things everyone up in here does. You know the usual chill with the homies, do beer runs, get a g-ride and cruise around for a cool minute, drop it off and go get shhh faced! Then wake up the next morning and do it again. That's how I do it. And what the reason for all this is? There is no reason why that just what I do.

-Gina

From The Beat: Do you think what you do is the right thing to be doing? In your age, you should be doing different things such as going to school, doing homework, planning what career you want for your life, participating in positive activities, staying at home, a looking for a way how to help your parents and not the things you've been doing. It's time you start seeing things from a different perspective before it's too late.

That's Why I Feel Helpless

Tonight I'm a write about feelin helpless. Right now while I'm locked up and my lady is havin problems with her family. Usually she comes to me at times like this and 'cause I'm locked down I can't tend to her needs. That's why I feel helpless.

Also, my brother is getting messed with by a rival gang, all because of something I did in the past. They just recently jumped him and stuck him with a screw driver. And for that I feel like it's my fault and there ain't nothing I can do in here.

These are just some of the reasons that I feel helpless. Well Beat, I'm out.

-Nok

From The Beat: Thank goodness for the phone and letter writing, so you can at least share with your girl your feelings and thoughts. As for your brother, glad he is alive, and if it is from something you have done, well, let him know, the old ways are over and the new ways are staying away from negativity and getting back into school. You know better than most what it feels like to be locked up for the last six months, with a good chance of going to prison. It's not worth it, right?

Judgment Day

What's up, my fellow homeboys and homegirls? If you forgot who this be, the one and only Bugzy, droppin' you these lines raw, real and uncut, straight from maximum security. I wanna let all of you know how shhh goes down. Yesterday, I went to court for sentencing after a trial of one year. While I was sitting there, staring into the eyes of a man just like you and I, trying to play God with our very lives, knowing my fate awaited me, had me sitting in cold sweats, listening to the DA's verbal assaults puncture me like a clothes pin to a balloon. I was ready to pop.

"Your Honor, he is a very violent, impulsive and educated young man who has been a gang member for several years. With those three traits that this young man has acquired, he can be very dangerous to our very society, your Honor." Those were the very words that were spoken by the DA.

After hearing that shhh, I knew where I was headed—one-way trip on the Grey Goose, straight to CYA. My max time is somewhere in the double digits. I was sentenced to three years at first. I then requested time served. I then was given two years. What a freaking scam! The two years plus my one year down is... three! These people are good! They call us liars and deceivers... what a joke! But in the end, it all came down to who gots the most Benjamin Franklins in their pockets. Life's life.

I guess the thing that sucks is, I would not be here if I wouldn't have been snitched on. Can't believe people these days. Snitch on somebody, then go on living life, deceiving other homeboys, like your rep is good. Code of silence, baby. Code of silence, baby. Karma/payback is a must, where I'm from.

Well, I'm out. Much love to all who are locked down. One love, and that love is for myself.

-Bugzy

From The Beat: You know, Bugzy, we're waiting for you to honestly look at why you are where you are and why you're facing what you're facing. No, it's not because of a snitch, it's because you gave the snitch something to trade for his own benefit, and that will never change. As long as you're doing the dirt that leads here, you'll end up here (or worse, as you're about to experience). Unless you begin to take responsibility for your own actions, and stop pointing the finger at others for the consequences you yourself set in motion, you'll be trapped in a downward spiral. Of course, those with money in their pockets do get away with a lot more shhh than poor people, but it's not always the case that people with money escape the consequences of their actions. Look at the Enron chiefs whose millions can't keep them out of prison (and who complain that the only reason they got caught was because some low-paid secretary snitched on them). The only reason we get so passionate with our responses to you (in other words, ANGRY), is because you are SO talented. You could do so much that is positive, not just for your community but for yourself. You have the ability to remake yourself. What you don't have is the will to do it. You can curse the system 'til you draw your last breath, but nothing will change until you do.

Starting A New Life

The reason why I committed criminal acts was because I was looking for attention and it seemed fun until the time I came here to the hall. Some of the things that I committed I regret, because I had to learn the hard way. If I were to have someone to look up to, like a father, for instance, instead of a father who never cared, and having a part time mom who had to work to have a living space and food on the table, I would have probably not done what I did in the past. For instance, not going to school and hanging out on the streets with my homies, and getting all loaded and twisted and ditching the popos for that me and my homies wouldn't get caught up and get charged for being under the influence in public.

It seemed like fun, but in reality, as I think now, it wasn't that cool at all. I wish that I would have listened to my teachers at school and having to come to get a diploma, but I'm too far away from that now. I also wish that I still had family trust from aunts and uncles and my brother and sister.

I chose them green buds and kept on drinking. When they told me to stop, but I kept on doing my two drugs of choice 'til I got locked up on February 13, 2006. I hope that my interview with Advent Drug Rehab accepted me, because I want a second chance on living a drug and criminal free life and regain family trust again. I've learned my lesson here in juvy, and just want to leave here, too inpatient already, and start a fresh new life and go straight, instead of going crooked, like in the past.

-Rt

From The Beat: You know, Rt, some of what you describe — looking for attention, not listening to teachers, etc. — is the definition of being a child. But you are no longer a child, which is why you are now thinking for yourself, and realizing that the choice is yours. We applaud you for wanting the kind of help that Advent and other drug rehab programs offer. Those two drugs of choice can both get a real grip on you, so you will always be wise to have a group of people to meet with and support each other in your ongoing commitment to "start a fresh new life and go straight..."

I Can Live A Better Life

Today, my biggest concern is how the judge is sending so many juveniles to CYA. That's sad how the judges are sending youth to CYA, knowing they're not going to get no rehabilitation, no help to better themselves, for when they get out. Your court and the DAs criticizing you, saying, "We can't let him out. He's a menace to society."

They lock us up like animals in a cage, with all this anger stored in us. Seeing I'm saying this because it's happening to me. The judges, DAs, they don't know me. They're just going by what the papers say. They try making me seem so violent. I feel like I'm so misunderstood. They don't know what I'm going through—being separated from your family for a while could really hurt you.

I just want the judge to read the letter I write him, and not act like he does. I just want to get sentenced. Already been here nine months and they're still telling me to wait. Damn, I really need a chance to do good and prove myself to society that I can live a better life.

-Raul

From The Beat: There is so much that is true in this piece, Raul. We don't think much of the criminal justice system is rational, if it's designed to make people better. Instead, punishment has become an end in itself — whatever it might produce. But knowing the truth of the system doesn't move your life forward or get you out from under it. Unfortunately, since the system won't change, you must. If you know what leads you here, then you also know what you need to stop doing so that you don't come back. We're interested to know what changes you would make in the system if you were running things.

Only God Knows Me

People see me as what they heard about me

Yet, they don't know me

So why people think they know me?

Is it because the bad things I did?

The only person that really knows me is the Man, God

Between me and Him, we know I'm a good person

-V

From The Beat: Can you tell us why you are a good person? Can you describe some of the goodness that God sees? Since we haven't heard anything about "the bad things" you did, we can only judge you by what you tell us. So tell us, who are you?

Death

Death has been a big part of my life, because when I was born, I wasn't supposed to live. When I was out, it didn't really bother me, but now that I'm in here, I think about it and I feel like I have a bigger purpose in life than I think! Death has also been a big part of my life, because of my unborn child.

-Marx

From The Beat: This very short piece makes us want to know about so many details. What do you mean you weren't supposed to live? Why not? What happened? When did you start thinking about your reasons for being here? Have you come up with any answers you care to share with The Beat?

Helpless

I feel sad,

made my dad mad.

Can't wait to get out,

I'm keeping count

of the time I spent in this place.

I'm missing my lady

she want us to have a baby,

I said maybe.

Wasting my time

making a rhyme

nothing else to do.

I made a wrong choice

hope to hear God's voice,

send me a message

anything I'll take it,

just get me out.

I know I can make it

I don't got to fake it,

but I wanna bounce

tell everyone late

see you on the outs.

Missing you

got me feeling lonely.

-Rene

From The Beat: What's the plan when you get out? What must you do so you don't return? What do you want God to say to you, that you do not already know? Time is now to get busy with bettering your life!

So Helpless

I'm so helpless in this juvenile hall cell. I can't take this no more. I feel like I'm up in hell, but I gotta realize that my decisions put me in this position for my reactions. My folks know I been slippin'.

I hesitate every morning to wake up in my cell. Toss and turn. Then I realize that I'm really in jail.

Right now, I'm just letting flows go off my dome. Even though I don't get that much respect, in this place, I feel like I'm still the king of my throne.

-Tre

From The Beat: Why should anyone respect you in a place where very few are respected? You need to not worry about how others see you and get your act together so you do not find yourself in such a predicament.

I Keep My Mind Busy To Stop The Stress

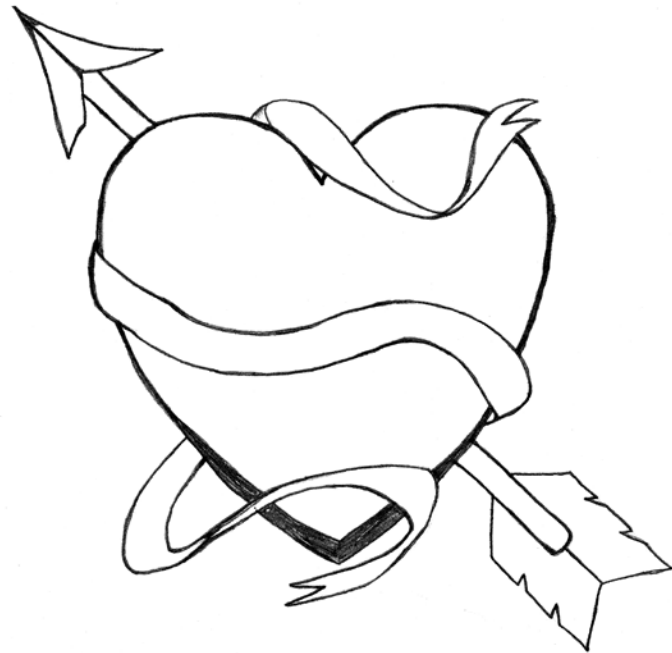
There's a lot of stuff I'm feeling helpless about out there, and can't even do anything about it. That's the thing that bugs me the most. I know my family needs me right now, to help them out, but can't even do shhh, because they put me in a place where it's helpless if you're talking about the outside world.

Well, I deal with this kind of helplessness by looking at magazines, reading books, writing letters, and mostly by working out. By keeping your mind busy, you will lower your stress, that's how it works for me. Sometimes feeling helpless can make a person stress out and go crazy in these rooms, so just keep it busy.

All right, Beat, I'm out! To everybody that's locked up—keep your heads up!

-Unknown Viet Boi

From The Beat: Do you ever think about your future, Viet Boi, and how to prepare yourself for it? We are all helpless to change the past, but we are not helpless to change the future. What changes do you foresee in your future life of freedom?



To My Fellow Beaters

How are y'all doin'? As for this vato I'm doing great, even though there is no reason to feel great, but he,y I might as well make the best out of the worst! Que no?

Well back to the topic at hand, the topic I chose was feeling helpless, and what makes me helpless is not being able to be there for my family. My mom comes and sees me and I see her tryin' to hold back her tears, because all the pain me and my older brother have put her through. like by having Gang Task Force coming into my house and getting in front of me and all my family.

Also what gets me mad is that I can't be there for all my homeboys and worrying everyday that if everyone I care bout is okay, 'cause we don't have any real contact to the outside, well my time is running out so to all stay up.

-C

From The Beat: If you are still worrying about not being there for the homies, then in truth you are not ready to make a change for the better. Seriously, what do you tell your mom when she comes and sees you? Do you lie to her? Do you tell her that the gang is more important to you than she is? What?

Being Misunderstood

The pain and pressure of being misunderstood can make a young man go crazy an' do things that they wouldn't do if there was no pressure or pain. When I feel the pain, I don't know what to do, so I think for a long time an' draw what I was thinking or feeling at the moment.

Being under pressure can make you do or say things that you will regret when you finally get a hold of yourself. They misunderstood me when I said, "I don't cruise control, I control the cruise." Ha! Ha! Ha!

-Misunderstood

From The Beat: What did "they" think you meant when you said you don't cruise control, you control cruise? What does it mean? We really admire your strategy of drawing what you're feeling. Have you ever drawn when you're feeling great to see the differences between those drawings and the ones you do when you're feeling pain?

Watch Everything

I am in juvenile for selling dope
The only reason why I sell dope is because it is fast money
but selling dope is not easy
you always going to be watched by the under covers
you don't know when they going to get you
so you got to watch everything that goes on around you
if you don't you could be going down
they have so many operations
they have decoys
people on paper work
so many people try to be on the block
you just don't know
that the people you may call your friends may be snitching
on you
the police do what ever it takes
they will pay you just to snitch on other people
who's selling and who's not selling
who's using and who's not using
but now I know because under covers ran up on me
it was so unexpected
I was inside a restaurant eating some food
they came inside and got me for somebody that I sold to
two hours ago
I went down for something called "Indictment."

-Andre

From The Beat: Hmmm, now what? What do you do next? Are you determined to get up and out of the system? Do you say oh well and go back to the block to sell? What? May we ask, why did you get into this lifestyle in the first place? Is it necessary? Is it a sickness?

Why We Do What We Do

We do what we do
For our crew
And a cause
Limit the government
We run through the street laws
Something like outlaws
Brothas get scratch marks
Like claw marks
Some do it for their 'hood and their homies
Some kids get lost and are just lucky
But I do what I do for my sista's and brotha's
My blood and my cousin's
I do what I do
In truth
It's true
I walk up in the club and
I stay dirty dubbin
Peace out.

-Robert

From The Beat: And that's why you ended up where you are now. We get it! What's the purpose in representing and defending something that won't get you anywhere? Grow up!

My Flow

1st verse:

Situations critical being locked up ain't no joke
I'm doing like a year from what the judge said that's all she wrote

So take a few notes and just listen
About a flow I got in store but the point you missin'
I'm locked up once again wit' white boys Mexicans and ninjas

Who ended up in here 'cause they was drunk off liquor
Like me, mayne, you can take me for example
I spit a bit off how I feel and this is just a sample
It all started one day with Absolute Vodka
I didn't think of the outcome I never would of thought of

Me getting' locked up.... Hell no man
But turns out I did I had a failed master plan
I was drunk once again off of many beers...
And the liquor now I'm doing time around a year
It ain't nothing man I've done time before
Been starin' at four walls a toilet, sink, and a door
Straight to the floor feels like where I should be
But instead I just relax and kick it with my celly

Chorus:

I'm locked up locked up locked up
I'm locked up they tryin' to hold me down
I'm locked up locked up locked up
But I stay strapped with that sucka free sound

Verse 2

Wake up in the morning take a look at my ceiling
Throw off my blankets I don't like this feeling
I'm killing more time and I look at my roommate
I still got a month to go just for my court date
Saw my momma last weekend on Sunday
I won't be here forever I'll get out someday
But while I'm waiting all I can do is kill time
Sit in my cell sneak a pencil and write a rhyme
But to be droppin' dimes me never ever
I've been a troublemaker from what I can remember
Then my day started hellla strange at seven-thirty
I'm still kind of tired 'cause it's hella early
I hear the loudspeaker time to brush my teeth
Do a little hygiene then it's time to eat
Off to the cafeteria it's time for breakfast
Eggs, oatmeal, and some messed up cornbread
Thinking in my head why am I here again
But I gotta stay quiet, oh movement back to my unit
So an hour passed and it's time for school
Watching them fools actin' way too cool
They think they hard but when you step up to say something
What you starring at foo! Who me? Oooh nothing.

Chorus:

I'm locked up locked up locked up
I'm locked up they tryin' to hold me down
I'm locked up locked up locked up
But I stay strapped with that sucka free sound.

Verse 3

Doing time in this unit locked up with the inmates
I got nineteen hours of lockdown waitin' for my court date
Trial in a month hoping everything's all right
Visitations on Sunday see my mom for what feels like...
five minutes but it really was an hour
Then back to sleep, eat, then take a shower
Same routine day to night and night to day
Prayin' and wishing everything will be okay
I'm hopin things get better I'm waiting for a letter
From one of the homies, a girl or a family member
'Cause they let me know anything that's going on out there
I wish I can join 'em but the system just ain't fair
So I sit and stare at my walls and a ceiling

I know it sounds boring but I can't shake this feeling
Ya feel me the system just wants it's money
They don't care about education they want you to stay a dummy
But a white boy like me can deal with these hard times
'Cause I feel better expressin' myself through every rhyme.

Chorus:

I'm locked up locked up locked up
I'm locked up they tryin' to hold me down
I'm locked up locked up locked up
But I stay strapped with that sucka free sound

Verse 4

I'm locked up mayne they tryin to hold me down
But I stay strapped with that sucka free sound
All about the skrilla scratch paper
I want the dinero and a purple stuffed vega
Playa this is the deal this is how I feel
Oh comin' up on skirll it's realer than real
I appeal the fact the systems trying to take my cash
Accusing me of being in alleyways selling this here crack
It's like that mayne it's the way the game goes
But I never trip and fall I stay on my toes
Who knows what could happen while I'm waiting for the outcome
Thinking about my momma, family, homies and that one blunt
That got my life started up on the wrong path
I'm a train that fell off the railroad trying to get back on track
Spark a sac mayne listen to my commandments
I hate being locked up I just can't stand it.

Chorus:

I'm locked up locked up locked up
I'm locked up they tryin' to hold me down
I'm locked up locked up locked up
But I stay strapped with that sucka free sound

Verse 5

I woke up in a cold sweat my clothes are drenched
Just had a nightmare but that was past tense
I'm trippin' hella hard I need to go back to sleep
I need a nice dream go back to countin' sheep
But I can't havin flashbacks and nightmares
Thinking to myself why does the devil care
About takin' my soul from me what does he want with it
I feel like he wants my heart about to rip it from my stomach
He wants it...yeah...he needs it real bad
But he ain't gonna get I don't' care if he gets mad
On command he says give me yo' heart and soul
But I ain't hanging from a meat hook mind growin old
It's gonna stay fresh to the day that I die
When God decides to take my life then I'll ask why
Ask why he did it wasn't he a bit concerned
Now I got no family no life and the tables got turned
It burned my mind and it burned my heart
But I believe in reincarnation and a brand new start
So in my new life I'll be bumpin this song
Thinking about the story of a playa named Nate that life goes on.

Chorus:

I'm locked up locked up locked up
I'm locked up they tryin' to hold me down
I'm locked up locked up locked up
But I stay strapped with that sucka free sound

-Young Nate

From The Beat: Your flow speaks volumes of the story of Nate, but is this the way you truly want t olive your life? We hope not. The time is now to rid your life of the negative. Take the initial steps to succeed free of the system and the many things that only keep you down. If anything, your song is educating us readers to not be like the person in this song. We hope the future of your life is anything but what you wrote here. Best!

Helpless

What makes me feel helpless while I'm incarcerated is when I hear my lady dat is pregnant wit' my kid cry over da phone an' I can't be next to her to hug an' kiss her an' make her feel better an' tell her how much I love her.

The other thing dat makes me helpless is gettin' a visit from my mom an' see her leave out of this place wit'out me.

Both these things are da worst in da world and make me feel hella helpless, but I deal wit it by prayin' most of da day, so these helpless days of my life are over soon.

-Oll

From The Beat: Pray, for sure, and keep hope alive for the future. Being a prisoner means being helpless in many ways, and that is a terrible feeling. But you will regain control over your life, so think ahead to that time, and prepare yourself. You have a loving heart. Don't let it get hard.

Emotions And How To Deal With Them

Today's topic is about emotions and how to deal with them. So I'm a tell you how I dealt with it when the homie Speedy (RIP) died. I couldn't believe it when I heard it. So I showed respect by going to his Rosery and to his funeral. So, to the homie Speedy, Rest In Peace.

-Gabriel

From The Beat: We're sorry for your loss, Gabriel. Horrible like this happens especially when people risk their lives by being in gangs, being in hot spots, or getting into drugs. We hope you stay out of trouble and try to take care of your life. What are you plans once out of here?

Meth

I have gone through lots of things when I was doing meth. I don't lie, but meth got me to hit rock bottom. I started to lose the confidence of my family when I was doing that and also my friends. But it got me into lots of bad things, that I don't want to do it no more.

-Clean

From The Beat: This is a big problem that you need to get rid of before it destroy your whole life like it has destroyed and killed many. There are rehabilitation programs available for youth that have changed the lives of many young people. You can be another one saved from this list. Look for help! Sounds like you want it too!

RIP Great Grandmother

I want to say I miss you and thanks for the good times. I know you are in Heaven, looking down on me. I wish I was there on that day you died. Instead, I was in here, locked up. I want to say good-bye in my prayers. The whole family misses you. I will never forget you.

-Creepier

From The Beat: It's always sad to lose someone you love so much, but you should comfort yourself with the knowledge that she knew you loved her and she loved you. Think about her always, and especially when — long into the future — you reach that rare title, "Great Grandfather."

It hurts me to hear that my friends are
moving on in life

getting good jobs, doing good in school
and I'm stuck in my cell
doing the same thing everyday.

The Love Machine

It sucks being locked up
when you're incarcerated it's like you're stuck in this
room.

Time stops for you and the whole world moves on without
you.

It hurts me to hear that my friends are moving on in life
getting good jobs, doing good in school and I'm stuck in
my cell

doing the same thing everyday.

Every time I think about what my family and friends are
doing without me,

I stress out, but there's nothing I can do about it.

The only thing that I can do when I feel helpless is look
out my window and hope

I get out soon. But deep inside I know that it doesn't help
out much.

-Feeling bad

From The Beat: We bet once you get the chance at freedom once again, you will be a whole lot wiser in your choices. What's the plan?



Helpless

I'm feelin' helpless 'cause I recently got failed from the
Wright Center

Now I don't know what to do to make my moms feel better!

I remember the look on her face when I was close to
getting' out

Now I'm in a room with a locked door wonderin' why I took
that route

From having a record of I.R.S. stating INSUBORDINATION,
to getting locked in a cell, head full of frustration, about
how my mom's doin' with the news, got my feelin' helpless
no knowin' what to do, all I can do is hope that I can go
back and finish my program

So I can go home and chill with the fam!

I remember I used to say: "Do it like I'm doin' it, when I'm
doin' it big, if you like what you see, then let's roll and get
keyed."

Now I realize this ain't how it's suppose to be, so I hope
y'all see what I see,

And not make the same slip if you know what I mean.

-It's strictly family

From The Beat: How does failing a program make you feel helpless? Educate us. What must you do to make your mom feel better? Where did it go wrong with the program you were in? You have the answers as to why you are in the position you are in? If you were the system, would you send yourself back to the program? Best to you!

Same Faces

Every morning I wake up and see the same faces. I catch myself staring at the same hole in the wall, everyday. But when you're locked up, that's when you find out who you are.

-Eddie

From The Beat: Eddie, there's a writer you should read. His name is Camus. He might be your distant, distant, distant uncle – at least your literary uncle. Good writing.

Advice

If I could give some advice to youngsters like me, I would tell them not to use a gun, unless they need it. Because sometimes you need it – if they are going to get in your home and hurt your family. But some people carry guns and end up in prison, twenty five to life. I am telling you this because I know a lot of vatos that have done this stuff. Not only homies, but my brother ended up on one of these cases. And that hurt my mom a lot, and me. So think more than twice.

-Ls

From The Beat: This is good advice. We'd go further. We don't think you need a gun in your house, either. Many lives are lost every year to domestic violence – one partner shooting another. Guns make violence too easy. We're sorry for the difficulties that have come into your family because of guns. Thanks for your advice to youngsters.

My Dad's Gun

The first time I saw a gun was when I was in sixth grade. I was at my house and I was in my dad's room, going through his stuff. I found his gun and I got excited because it was the first time I ever saw a real gun. And the next day I was at the park with my friends and I asked them if they wanted to see something cool. So I showed them my dad's gun, and they got excited, too.

-P

From The Beat: You know you shouldn't have been snooping in your dad's room. What if someone less responsible than you, one of your friends, for instance, had picked up your dad's gun, and started 'joking' around with it? Maybe it was loaded. Did you know that many children are killed each year with guns they find at home, just like you did. We wonder what your relationship is now, today, with guns.

Soon

Going to the pen soon.
Needing money for a box of cigarettes.
Feeling like a slave
with fire in my head.
Hearing chains jingle,
horns even, and bombs exploding.
My hair hairy and messy.
Needing a haircut.
Writing letters through the night.

-Hairy

From The Beat: Good poem. The imagination can be a scary thing. You're good with a pencil. Keep writing. Write a book. And read ten times as many poems as you write. Read every poet you can get your eyes on.

The Chase

One time I was chased by the cops. I was so tired I wanted to stop, but I just kept running, only slower and slower. Then, all of a sudden I felt a shock and I went stiff. I fell to the ground. I realized I'd been tazed by a nark.

-Joseph

From The Beat: We are sure that did not feel good. You have to be very fast to outrun electricity.

When I Get Out

When I get out I'm going to try to stop smoking weed and then stop drinking. And hopefully, my mom will have a house we can both live in. When I get out of my program, I'm going to try to get off probation so I don't have to go to court every month, and so I don't have to deal with probation officers bothering me.

-Sonny

From The Beat: Sonny, we hope your mom has found a place where you can both live together. You have a lot to accomplish, but as they say, you can do it one day, one hour, one minute, at a time.

Guns And The Law

Guns – well, I don't think guns should be legal. If they were legal, everyone would carry guns. And if they had guns, when they got into a fight and lost, they would come back with their guns for revenge. In my opinion, guns should stay illegal.

-Jay

From The Beat: Thanks for your opinion. But you know, of course, that legal or not, most people can get their hands on a gun, if they want to. What would you do about that?

Always Into Something

Well, my name is Andrew. I am finally leaving this place. But I have no one to blame but myself. I had two chances to get off probation, but I messed up, breaking laws and getting violations. Then I ended up back in the hall. I had a chance to leave but I messed up again and got on lockdown. I've been sentenced to a group home. I was denied by two group homes because of my tattoos. I have them where you can see them, like my neck and face. I'm not trying to brag, but trying to say: don't get them where you can see them.

They didn't take time to get to know me. I'm a good person. They just judged a book by its cover. But a group home finally accepted me. They looked past the tats and I am grateful for the opportunity. I am going to complete my program and get on with my biz.

-Andrew

From The Beat: We suspect it will be good biz that you're up to. Remember, you're always the CEO of your own biz.

Guns

Guns can be dangerous, for many reasons – especially for someone with anger problems, or a drug addiction. I don't like guns, but sometimes it's a must to have one – for your own protection. You never know who has one and if he is going to use it against you. So, I would own a gun, if I had to.

-C

From The Beat: So, where does it stop? You never know who might be carrying "the plague", but you don't walk around in a gas mask. We won't be safe from the plague of guns until people simply stop owning them. That is, if no one wanted them, they wouldn't be made. We have a lot of educating to do, wouldn't you say?

Bomb

There's a bomb in my head.

I don't know what to do.
Make the decision to hurt someone,
or hurt my heart?

I don't know the answer.
Grace, or fire?

-Ismaya

From The Beat: Yes, you do know the answer. Good writing, by the way.

The Chase

One day I was chillin' with the homies. We were wasted and we busted a mission. We ran and ran. What we didn't expect was a copter in the sky. I changed my outfit and started hopping like a champ, but I couldn't ditch the copter. So I gave up and was taken down.

-JV

From The Beat: This is an unusual chase story. Not too many folks get hunted down by a helicopter. Perhaps the lesson is that when you mess up, you can never tell from which direction justice will come... but it will come.

Job

Right now I'm in the halls
Starin' at four walls
Tryin' to get the job of my dreams
That pays seventeen dollars an hour
Got to fill out an application
But my PO just won't release me
Man, this shhh got me hot
I need this job
Like corn needs the cob
If I don't get this job
I might be going back to robbing people

-Jordan

From The Beat: Well, if you don't get that \$17 an hour job, what about a \$10 job, or even an \$8 job? Will this be your first real job? Why would you even consider robbing someone who probably worked hard to earn that money you just violently took? Why would you deserve that cash? Wise up or stay locked up!

Please

I hate being misunderstood. Just 'cause I'm Black, doesn't mean I steal. I am a thief, but still don't judge me unless you know me.

I have a disease. It came from birth. I'm a thief. I try to stop, but I can't. I promise myself, but I spuckled up and my disease has no cure. I don't know if it's contagious.

-Jamal

From The Beat: We can't tell if you're playing us or not. Lots of us in There are people who do feel compelled to steal—they're called kleptomaniacs. So if you seriously have a problem stopping yourself from stealing, how about talking to your juvy counselor, the nurse, or going to your doctor when you're home again? Get some help now. You know the end result.

Feeling Helpless

I be feeling helpless
My lil' brother is out in the world
Wit'out me
I can't be there to help him
I can't tell him to stop fighting
An' he's only ten
An' he got dummy hands
I can't tell him that what he did was wrong
I feel helpless when I can't sit him down
An' say "Oh, lil' dude
You need a be coo'
'For you end up in here"
Not be able a help him
Makes me feel helpless

-Ashley

From The Beat: Very inspirational poem. But there are things you can do, even from juvy, that can help him. If you write or call your brother and talk to him from your heart, maybe he'll hear you.

Misunderstood

Back to room ten once again
To slam on the same walls
That I did way back when
To spit the same flows
Wear the same clothes
And miss those crisp Girbeaus
Now, as I sit in these halls
Rendering my downfalls
I get kicked outta class, ready to kick
I hate this path; ain't gonna come back

-Lil' J

From The Beat: It must be maddening to be back in the same room in juvy where you were years ago, almost as if you'd learned nothing and have made no progress since then. What do you have to start doing or stop doing, when you're out again, to keep your freedom for good?

The Pain And Pressure At Being Misunderstood

I just do it and think later. That is the reason I'm in here, locked up, and don't even know when I'm gettin' out. I just let it go by itself, so I don't trip on that kind of shhh. I keep all the stress and all that stuff to myself, because if you do, they just look at you crazy.

-Santos

From The Beat: You probably nailed the problem in your first sentence. What would happen if you think hard before you do something? Why don't you try that once and see what happens?

I Can't Help Anyone While I'm In Here

I feel helpless when I am locked up, 'cause I can't help anybody I care about. I can't help my lil' cousin grow up, or give him a good role model. He looks up to me and tries to be like me. He ain't been locked up yet, but when he do, he probably won't want to be like me anymore.

-Desmond

From The Beat: You may be right, that your cousin may feel disillusioned about your being in juvy and decide to design his life to continue going to school, get a job, to make it in the "outside world." What can you do to help teach him the lessons you've already learned, so he won't follow you into juvy?

I Express My Feelings Through Dancing

I do what I do because I express my feelings with the things I do and that is turf dancing. It's a gift from God gave me. I started when I was ten. I learned it from my brother from another mother, Demetrius Zigler (RIP.) When I'm mad or just having a bad ass day, I start turf dancing and it can make my whole day better!

Another reason why I do it is because I make a name for myself all over the county. I would like to start betting people for their money, because I know for sure I'm go' win. I learned from the best, the champ, Meech, my brother from another! But I really would like to join a team out there, because I dedicate my whole life to this movement. They have now turned it into a sport near you!

I'm out, Beat, tomorrow or the next day, and I'm not coming back.

-Omari

From The Beat: Can you describe in words what your dance looks like? Good luck in joining a turf dance team, or better yet a dance team away from the turf!

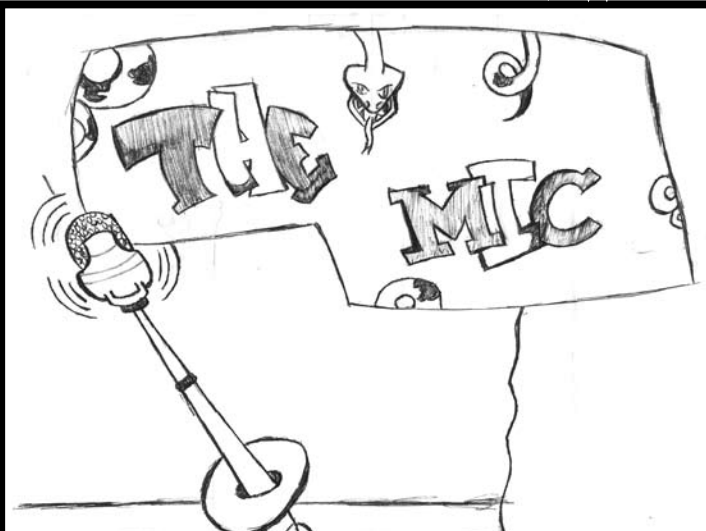
Lying To Myself

Lying and stealing is a way of life
I want to, but I could never seem to do right
I lie when I don't have to
I lie when I get at you
I even lie in some of my raps, too

I can't stop or control myself
I try to condone myself
I even lie to myself
Like I don't own myself
I admit I think I need a lot of help

-Shannon

From The Beat: You said that you always lied, you said you did it because you didn't want anyone to get close to you, so you lie to protect yourself. That's real and it must be hard for you to say that out loud and to write it for the world to read. We respect your honesty. Have you been burned by someone you cared about in the past, when you told him/her the truth? If so, it makes sense for you to revert to lying all the time. The problem is that when you always lie, it can happen that no one will believe you even if you do tell the truth, because they can't tell the difference. Why don't you tell someone you trust the truth a little at a time and see how s/he reacts? The first step is recognizing the problem now take the steps in correcting the sickness!



Counselor's Corner

From The Beat: It is such an honor to have this next contribution in the pages of The Beat Within. We not only welcome back our fine young writers from the Land of Enchantment aka New Mexico who are featured in this issue, we proudly have the man making this all come together for us many readers and writers and that is Steve Serna, who is a very dedicated counselor and Beat colleague from the Bernalillo County Detention Center in New Mexico. We appreciate his thoughts on our topic, and with that said, we are confident that our program will only get stronger and stronger with any help you all can give to our important work. Thank you Steve!

Calling Out To All Volunteers

A new voice started here for The Beat Within in the Land of Enchantment. As a staff for the Bernalillo County Detention Center it's not easy to find programs for our teens behind bars.

This may be only the third week The Beat Within has had a voice here in the Land of Enchantment; yet now I'm hearing that funding for this great project is becoming scarce. I often wonder how people can spend money for materialistic items, yet no one seems to want to spend a few coins on our youth? If we could put a little time and a little money in our youth, just maybe more of our youth would stay out of our cities Detention Centers.

After talking to many teens behind bars I've found that they got into trouble simply because there was nothing else to do. Every time a teen dance or a water park is open, something happens and they end up closed just a short time later.

This is my voice, from the Land of Enchantment, shouting out to all the adults out there to help out in this project. If you read The Beat Within you'll see that there is a great amount of talent in our youth, our future. Let's not turn a blind eye to our future, but embrace it.

-Steve Serna

Feeling Helpless

I am Freedom that is my name
When the door shuts it's not a game
Play with yours and be behind closed doors
I regret playing with mine
I sit here and miss the ones I love
And at the same time sit here and think of the man
from up above
Thank him for letting me breathe this air
And for giving the chance to tell these stories of mine I
have to share
These stories are stories of broken hearts and all the
pain I've caused
Oh how at times I wish I can just put my life on pause
Just long enough to make up for lost time
And a chance to let my inner self shine
All I ask for is time to replace the pain that I've caused
with happiness
And just for one more chance
One more chance to show the world I've changed and
how I sit here and hate how I'm
The one to always be blamed
It seems like people want to put me to shame.

-Debra

From The Beat: It would be easy to put life on pause to go back and change all the wrongs we have done, but the past is the past and now you must live life for the future and for all that life has to offer you. Remember Freedom is not for free, every one must give up a little to have that freedom. It's a small price we all pay to have what we have in our lives. Keep these words close and make the change that you deserve in life.

In My Room

When I'm in my room I daydream about the outs and all the good times I've had with families and friends. I think about parties I've attended and all the fun stuff me and my brothers did.

I daydream about my grandma and all the lectures she gives. I think about my mom and the things that were said, and then before I know it I'm fast asleep in my bed.

-Johnny

From The Beat: Continue dreaming Johnny, dream of your family and friends, and your mother's words. Some times our mothers say things we don't want to hear, but they say these things so we as their children have a better life. A better life then they could have had. Don't ever stop dreaming.

Land Of Enchantment

Day Dreaming In My Room
I sit in my room looking out the window
But everything in my mind is just like a black widow
Just reminiscing about all the good times
I had on the outs
With out leaving no doubt
my girl just might be out on the block
But where I live there's nothin' but rocks
stuffed in your socks
Looking for better days
while I'm in here eating these nasty ass trays
Thinking of those better days

-Jose

From the Beat: Life is about choices. You have two in life, a right choice and a wrong choice. When your put in a situation, and you have a choice, think of your girl and them nasty trays. It's easy to know what choice should be made.

Oh how at times I wish I can just put
my life on pause
Just long enough to make up
for lost time
And a chance to let my inner self shine

My Life Of Grief

Welcome to my life of grief
 Three attempts at suicide and I'm still alive
 I did not die, I don't know why
 Still here, unable to cry
 Can't think clearly, can't think at all
 My life is over by waterfall
 Always tumbling over a cliff
 Lost friends to murder, I still can't deal
 The pain of that is still too real
 Lost a girlfriend to suicide
 For some reason, she did die
 She's not here, I don't know why
 Times like this, I wish I had a tear to cry
 I have no family to call my own
 I was kicked to the curb, I feel so alone
 Try and try, but I don't get it right
 Maybe I was just meant to be
 Sad and depressed in this world of misery

-Ash Night

From The Beat: Of course you were not meant to be sad and depressed. It was not written in the stars that you be born into the circumstances you were born into, and had to grow up accommodating all kinds of things that most children never have to accommodate. But it would be a double tragedy if those circumstances dictated your ultimate fate — to live or to die. Don't let the snapshot of your life that is this moment lead you to believe it will always be the same. It won't. When we read Shakespeare's question, "To be or not to be..." we have no trouble answering that "to be" is better than "not to be."

Insane And Evil

Insanity is not evil
 But all evil is insane
 Evil itself is never funny
 But insanity sometimes can be
 Insane and evil

-Ash Night

From The Beat: Can an insane person distinguish between evil and good? Can you cite some examples of when insanity is funny? We're not sure if you think you're evil or not (we know you're not, whatever you think), but we're curious to know how this riff on insanity and evil came to be? Are these themes you often think about? What other thoughts do you have on the subject?

Too Much

I'm sitting here alone in my dark cell
 For me this is a living hell
 I'm thinking about all the pain I've gone through
 I think I've lost my mind, I've finally come unglued
 As I look back on the life I have led
 It's times like this I wish I had a gun to put to my head
 Nothing feels good, it only feels bad
 I'm done with acting happy when I'm really not
 It feels as though my body is slowly starting to rot
 I think my brother had it right
 When he said life isn't worth it and ended it on that night
 Too much time I have to think
 Too much time I count my blinks
 I have too much time that I don't want

-Ash Night

From The Beat: The appeal of suicide — no more pain, no more strife, no more consequences — is exactly why that's not a reasonable choice. You cannot conclude that the pain you feel today won't be replaced by joy tomorrow (with a new love, a new opportunity, a new burst of possibilities at freedom), unless there is no tomorrow. The fact that you pour out your heart in these bitter poems tells us that you are very much a part of life — and very much want to be. You are right for wanting to live, and those who made the choice to die are wrong if for no other reason than that they can never undo it.

I'm Trying . . .

I'm trying to find hope in a world of despair
 I'm trying to find a reason why I should even care
 I'm trying to do what's right, but everything I do is wrong
 I'm trying to live this life, I'm trying to be strong
 I'm trying to be a good person, but I'm so full of pain
 I'm trying to be a good person, but my life's a twisted game
 I'm so sick of trying and I'm so sick of failing
 I'm so sick of living in a world so un-care-ing
 I'm so fed up with everyone and everything
 I'm so done with trying to be seen
 I'm laying this on the table for you to see
 I'm not going to try, I'm not going to be

-Ash Night

From The Beat: Once again, the desperation comes through in this poem... but so does the hope and desire. Don't give up on those qualities, Ash Night. You have far too much to give... for you to give up!

What People Say

People say I'm crazy, yeah, maybe it's true
 People say I'm crazy for feeling the way I do
 They say I'm crazy 'cause I don't give a damn
 Look at my middle finger
 It won't go down, I think it's jammed
 You try and ask what's wrong with me
 But I know you don't care
 As I'm drunk as hell
 I think I'm Superman flying through the air
 People say I'm crazy, and I would have to agree
 I just took my 300th hit of LSD
 Hey, guess what, I think I'm in love with a tree
 I hate Bush, yeah I think he's a prick
 I would love to break his jaw with my fist
 People say I'm crazy, yeah, maybe it's true
 But I don't give a damn, unlike you

-Ash Night

From The Beat: We don't know if you're crazy or not, but it seems to us that you take a lot of pride in being thought of as crazy. We're not sure why, but we think there's something deeper than this going on inside you, and you use the mask of insanity to keep it hidden. And you're wrong if you think you are the only one who cares about you. You do care about yourself, don't you?

The Kind Of Person I Am

I'm the kind of person that will run naked into your house
 Slap your mother and tell her what I'm all about
 I'm the kind of person that will rob a bank with a fake gun
 Tell the people to put their hands in the air
 Yell "Bang" and then run
 I'm the kind of person that will pop a pill
 Start trippin', you tell me to chill
 Come to find out it was only Advil
 I'm the kind of person that doesn't care
 Watch me set flame to that old lady's hair
 I'm the kind of person that thinks he can fly
 About to jump out of an 80-story window
 And I'm not even high
 I'm the kind of person that loves distortion
 My mother was surprised 'cause I survived abortion

-Ash Night

From The Beat: Something of your words scream "Look at me!" While still you hide yourself in mystery/We can't tell if you're tripping or delirious/Or if you're playing with words or being serious/But since we know you're not stupid, and really quite wise/We'll leave you with this tiny bit of advice:/If you run into our house, naked or not/Be prepared to say bye-bye 'cause you're gonna get caught!

My Mother

What makes my mom so special to me is she is a very loving and caring mom. Whenever I need something or just want to talk, she's there for me. She got my back through it all.

I had so much problems in my life, and she was there to ride with me. That's why my mom is my favorite and most important lady in my life. She cares so much for me and has yet to stop caring for me. That why I love her with all my heart.

I'm so thankful for her being in my life. If you are reading this, Mom, I love you, and happy Mother's Day.

-Joseph

From The Beat: There is no reason why your mom shouldn't read t his... show it to her. We're sure she already knows how much you love her, but sometimes it's nice to see it written out in words.

Happy Mother's Day, Mom

Happy Mother's Day, Mom

I love you to death

You're the greatest mom ever

You give me love when I need it

You give me support when I don't have it

You help me get through hard times

You pick me up when I'm falling

When I am tired of everything

You give me words

That's pure energy in me

You always stood next to me

You never left me alone

And there's no way I can pay you back

But my plan is to show you that I understand

Happy Mother's Day, Mom

I love you to death

-No Name

From The Beat: It's a shame that you forgot to sign your name to this wonderful tribute to your wonderful mother. You say that you will never be able to pay her back, and of course that's true. (None of us will ever be able to pay our mothers back.) But if you find a way to stay out of trouble and out of the hall and jail, you will be showing her how much you love her, and giving her the best gift she could

I Just Want Out

I'm locked up in a room

Floor full of dirt

Please, someone give me a broom

I got court in a month

Just to find out

I'm going to be in here for six more months

I'm defended by a public defender

If you ask me

They're more like public pretenders

I'm judged by someone

Who looks down on me

I didn't hurt anyone

I just want out, finish school, BE FREE

But no

Now I'm wearing the next dude's drawe's

Eating food with about as much flavor

As plastic straws

-Ian

From The Beat: Of course you want out, Ian. Who wouldn't? You say you didn't hurt anyone, and that's literally true. But are you hurting someone when you take their property? Do you feel hurt when someone steals from you? (How about when the system steals time?) We're not saying this is the right place for you (we don't think it is), but we're wondering what you think the appropriate consequence should be for what you did.

And She Cooks, Too

The thing that makes my mother better is that she knows how to take care of us. Also, when we get in trouble, she always shows up and other parents never show up for their sons.

Also, she cooks for us after she comes home from work so tired, and she still does it. That's what makes my mom better than others.

-Estevan

From The Beat: It sounds like your mom has her hands full. She takes care of you. She works. She comes home and cooks. She cleans the house. She shows up for you when you're in trouble... And what do you do to show her how much you appreciate all that she does for you? Getting yourself locked up (and taken from her) is not a good way to show her how much you love her. A much better way is to stop doing the things that lead you here, and start making just a few of the sacrifices for her that she

When Grown Ups Act Like Children

Everybody act like children, especially grown ups. I remember this one lady told my parents one day, "Damn! You guys act like children," because they were arguing at this place, and me and my sister were just laughing behind them.

But sometimes people and grown ups act like children because sometimes it feels good thinking that you are a little girl or little boy. It's like remembering you when you were young. When grown ups act like children, it makes a smile on someone's face.

-Michael

From The Beat: They say that smiling and laughing are the best cure for sick people, so maybe when adults act like children, they are putting a smile on their own faces and it's better than medicine!

Mother's Day

What makes my mom better than other moms is the way that she cares for me and treats me. She may not be able to afford some things I want, but she would get it for me and my brothers and sisters when she can. She always tells us she loves us. Her personality is one of a kind. She makes us laugh and feel good about life. Her cooking is good all the time. She always visits us and hangs out.

-Henry

From The Beat: We hope you know how lucky you are to have such a loving and supportive mother. She has sacrificed many things in her life for you. So our question is, what are you willing to sacrifice for her? Your freedom is the best gift you could ever give her (or yourself), but in order to keep your freedom, you will probably have to stop doing some things. Those are the sacrifices we're talking about.

Mother's Day

My mother is the best in t his whole world because she took care of me when I was a baby, and she would never turn her back on me. She is my best friend, and I would give it his life up just to be with her right now.

But I just gotta fight through this. But I love you, Mom, and happy Mother's Day... I love you.

-Usò Tala

From The Beat: It would be a very bad trade to give up your life to be with your mom. You want to be alive when you're with her, and she wants you in the same condition! So, what you need to think about is the steps you need to take when you walk out of here, so that they don't lead you away from this wonderful woman ever again!

One Love To My Mother

To me, my mother is da best because she helped me since I was a little kid. Even when I was growing up, she never stopped helping me. Even when I came in I thought she was going to leave me. But three days later, she came and visited me, and I love her. Happy Mother's Day. One love.

-Check TL

From The Beat: Yes, we ask our mothers to put up with a lot when we're growing up, and they usually support us even

Lovin' Family

I love my family, and I know they love me too. But sometimes I do stupid things that hurt them mentally. Judges and Pos ask do I love my family. I reply I do. They say, "Then why do you do this?"

I put myself to think... Is it true? Do I hate my family? Do they hate me for what I do? But then I realize they can't hate me. I'm the baby of the family. If they would hate me, they wouldn't hug me like they do, talk to me like they do.

Man, this is silly! They love me just as much as I love them.

-Lil' Dusco

From The Beat: Of course they love you, David! You may do things that hurt them sometimes (we only hurt the ones we love), but you also do many things that show your love. Are you going to try to change any of those hurtful things you do when you get out of here? Like what?

Blindfolded

Sometimes I think about myself through someone else's eyes, and just imagine a boy tryin' to do good in life, and was locked up and tryin' to stay out of trouble while he's in juvenile hall.

When others see me, they probably see a street gang member, or a kid up to no good at all. But if they would see and I would see, I would see a kid with a blindfold over his eyes, just not able to see the world. Doesn't know what he might meet or what problem he might have, and he's just waiting for someone to take those blindfolds off!

-Michael

From The Beat: If you are the kid with the blindfold over his eyes, don't wait for someone to take it off. You take it off yourself! Open your eyes wide and look around. Is this where you want to be? Keep those eyes open and look back to the events that brought you here. Do you have any control over those events? Now, with your eyes wide open, you have the ability to see where you have been and where you are. If you want more of the same, keep yourself blindfolded. If you want change,

Falsely Accused

When I look at myself, I see a young, caring, helping young man. Hopefully, when other people look at me, they see the same thing I see. But unfortunately, all people don't. some people criticize me for where I come from and who I know. That's not very pleasant.

For example, I was in a store that had been robbed a couple weeks before. The officer was patrolling the perimeter. When the officer saw me, he immediately stopped me and questioned me about the robbery. He was saying all types of things, like, "I know you had something to do with the robbery!" But I really didn't. I had saw the officer once before I was stopped, and already he was accusing me of something I have no knowledge of. I felt offended that the officer was accusing me, and he never met me before.

-JAF

From The Beat: It always hurts when someone accuses us of something we didn't do. You said the officer never met you before, but you also said that you had been stopped once before by him. He was wrong to accuse you without evidence, but you must have left a first-impression on him when he stopped you before. Are you also guilty of forming an impression about him, which may or may not be the case?

SUNMAN'S LIGHT

While Dwight Abbott's remarkable book about growing up in the California Youth Authority (*I Cried, You Didn't Listen*) continues to be passed from one juvenile hall detainee to another, he again reaches out to the young to take stock of their lives — and to warn of the consequences unless they do. Drawing on a lifetime of concrete walls and bars, violence and repression, he remembers back to those young days when he, like you, promised POs, counselors and judges, and most of all his family and himself, that he would change his ways if only given another chance. He recalls how sincere those promises were... and how, despite his best intentions, he was unable to keep them. The consequences for that failure — spending more than 50 of his 64 years locked away from the world — he has now written about in detail in a new book he calls, appropriately, *Consequence* (though it has not yet been published). All of you who have promised to change (how many times?) but have not been able to pull it off yet should read what *Sunman's Light* has shared from the "home" he will occupy until he breathes his last at Salinas Valley State Prison.

Just One More Chance

It's not easy for a person to verbalize or write that their choices and decisions have been the wrong ones... until they are incarcerated. What is it about the inside of a cell, it's only lock affixed on the side of the door we cannot reach, that encourages us to confess we are wrong, and to swear, our hand to God, "If you let me go this time, I will never do it again"? I call it a "Reality check!"

Experiencing the consequences of our wrong choices and actions, possibly for the first time, we begin to understand we are obviously not doing the right things. It is then we understand we do not want to do those things that lead us like lambs to the slaughter to what awaits when we are arrested.

As we feel suffocated by the concrete and steel enveloping us, there is absolutely not a doubt we are being totally honest when telling ourselves, and anyone else who will listen — especially mom, the unit counselors and judges — that we won't do it again: "Just one more chance?"

Our problem, after being given that chance, is within the time it takes to get back to the 'hood, or maybe two days (might even amaze ourselves and last week), we have forgotten about the emotional and psychological nightmare we just left. As we swagger down the street, pants so low on our hips we keep pulling them up (of course we have to be just like all the homies, right?) a phenomenon occurs: our minds erase any memory we had had of juvie, the ranch program we just completed, the year at CYA. All we care about is reaching "homie's house" where we will sit in his bedroom blasting blunts, drinking forties, and talking bad about the ____ (fill in the blank) living on the other end of town. Absolutely nothing has changed, no matter we meant every word we said when we were locked up.

Each of our lives return to exactly what it was before we went to juvie. Everything is "cool and mellow." We give no thought to the fact that within a short period of time we will be back, weeping, pleading, as we sit on the hard wooden bench while being processed, then in the counselors office, through the night inside "that room," the one with the lock only on one side of the door, sobbing uncontrollably during visits with our family, if we are fortunate to one more chance. "If you let me go this time, I will never do it again!"

Again, we will mean every word of it; we are not lying. We really know if they give us one more chance we will never again return to lock-up. Only something seems to have changed this time. We are thinking, why am I having so much trouble getting someone to listen to me? We are beginning to realize we "have a problem."

It is exactly what I did as I grew up in the juvenile penal system, where I sat at stupid little desks, facing front, told not to talk while listening to someone who "thinks he know everything..." Where I would sit with my little bird-chest stuck out, chin up, lookin' hard, until the next time I was begging the counselor, or the judge, to "give me a break," tears would make Niagara Falls proud flowing from my eyes, down the cheeks of my face.

After each court hearing I would be escorted back to the

Consequence

I recently completed penning the sequel to *I Cried, You Didn't Listen*, and have titled it *Consequence*. Should you get the chance to read it, you will learn that what you have read in *I Cried, You Didn't Listen* is "Child's Play," when compared to what awaits all who enter my house here.

Upon the pages of *CONSEQUENCE* journey with me through Soledad, San Quentin, Folsom, and other prisons, where nothing is nice. I'll share with you the truth about 'our' politics, and the gory murders of those who continue to make wrong choices, don't play by our rules when they arrive here. You will 'hear' the muffled cries and moans of a young man, a new arrival unfortunate enough to get caught slipping. I will put you "in the car" to ride along with the gangs, the same ones that will keep you in your place should you come here, a "Place" you have no idea exists, though you might think you do because of the lies homie has told you there at juvie about my house.

I am doing all I can to find someone to put the manuscript in print so that *The Beat* can get it to you. As the publishing world is extremely fickle, I cannot promise anything except I will not quit trying. I shout out my respects to all of you.

Hall. Just before I stepped through the entry way and found myself back on the unit, I would remember the large wet spots near the collar of my undershirt that I had pulled up to wipe the tears from my eyes. My fingers fumbled with the top button of my shirt. I'd tell my homies, "It ain't nothing," and talk shhh about "the system," trying to convince everyone that life didn't make them any harder and tougher than me.

I did the same for years at the California Youth Authority, until it finally dawned upon me I did not have any more "chances" coming, that they were no longer listening to me; that the only way I was going stop resembling the dog chasing its tail, was do my time, and do what I said I would do the next time I went to the streets.

Fifteen years young, playing the game, working my way up "the pecking order," there was an accident. I killed another kid at El Paso De Robles School for boys (CYA), and life as I had hoped to experience it was never going to be, no matter I did not intend what happened. I cut his throat, was "just going to scratch him," with a shoe leather trim knife blade, and went too deep. He had attempted to put smut on me, and I wanted the others to know they should not "mess with me."

I have never forgot him. I will always remember his name and the look in his eyes asking "Why?" He had been just another boy struggling to be accepted, doing and wanting nothing more than I did, and for that I killed him.

I am 64. It has been 49 years since that day above, and I continued on with this journey that began when I was nine. I understand now that had I chosen to 'remember' to keep the promises I had sobbed to my family, to my counselors, and as I stood before the judges, that if they would only "give me one more chance and I will never do it again," the last fifty-five years would have gone much differently. It's not too late for most of you. You do not have to look into a mirror and find me staring back out at you.

"But I got to go back to the 'hood and the homies, know what I mean? I'm 'in,' you know?"

Yeah, I do "know." Been there, done that. What are you asking me for? You already know the answer: Stand up, take your lumps from the homies when they jump you out, and then go on with the life you just earned by being what a man is really all about.

Of course, you can continue on with the alternative: let homie the shot caller keep dictating how you are going to live your life, because you are not smart enough to call your own shots. But you have to remember, when you get caught up for that "last time" don't bother sniveling and crying to your family, your counselors, and the judge; they aren't listening anymore.

I guess this is how my cards have been dealt,
Me not with you, but with someone else.

I Need U

I need you more than air itself
"U" with him? It's just not fair.
My only wish is to be with "U"
But how can I if you're with him too?
When I told "U" that I loved "U"
I thought everything would change,
I'm sorry... I forgot that love and hearts
Cannot be replaced
When I told "U" that I loved "U"
I thought "U" would drop everything
And run to me
Maybe even someday I would get
On one knee and say
"Baby, I love 'U' will 'U' marry me"
I need to stop dreaming and open my eyes.
"U" and I we will never be
Why is it taking me so long to see?
That "U" love him, and you don't love me

JD When we're deprived of things to do on a regular basis, our thoughts sometimes wander to things we have no control over. This especially happens to us when we're incarcerated because when we're incarcerated we're deprived of many things. Not only that, but we also don't have control over anything but ourselves and when incarcerated others have control over us most of the time. So to think about a significant other being loyal to us during these times will usually lead to self-sabotaging feelings of pity, regret, and helplessness. This next writer, who's writing us from one of the most notorious California Youth Authority institutions, N.A. Chaderjian in Stockton, CA, is going through this very thing and expresses that in his latest installment of poems. We hope he doesn't beat himself up about things he can't control, but if he does, we know that in the end there's something to be learned from this pain. And if he's aware like he's portrayed in these poems, we don't think he'll have a problem recognizing that lesson. Thank you for two very painful poems...

My Love

My love I'm starting to see
That we will never be
I don't know if I should give up
Hope and stop trying
Or if I should never stop
And keep on crying
My mind and heartache
When I see you together
I don't know what to do
When you say that you'll be with him forever
I want to hate you so I can move on
But I have been at this crazy game for way too long
I guess this is how my cards have been dealt,
Me not with you, but with someone else.

JOSE Our nation has been built on the blood and sweat of people who we've treated horribly since the day the United States was stripped from Native Americans. And even to this day, there are immigration laws being passed like we're trying to keep people out when we weren't welcome in the first place. This next writer, who's writing from Pelican Bay State Prison in Crescent City, CA, talks about the struggles our 'minorities' have had to go through. And we're sure that when he says minorities, he's talking about the power people have rather than the actual number of those people. For us minorities are actually the majority when it comes to numbers. He talks about the lack of education and how that affects the furtherance of our people. How ironic it is to call someone else an immigrant when the only people who aren't immigrants in this country are the Native Americans. We appreciate him shedding light on this subject because it's one not many people are brave enough to tackle.

Our Minorities

To elaborate on those subjects that still continue to affect our minorities, first we must understand two important matters. How did we become an integral part in our society? And why our economic and political status are less developed than those of our whites counterparts. A brief review of our history indicates that the economy of this nation was built of the backs of African slaves. Throughout generations African Americans have been exploited in various forms. However despite centuries of oppression we have managed to achieve equality on both political and economical arenas. Thanks to great leaders, such as Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr. Cesar Chavez just to mention a few. Although the road from the emancipation of slavery to the civil rights has been a tough one, it also has been a joyous path. From this information we can conclude that our ancestors did not enjoy political and economical equality the English settlers had complete monopoly of the resources and education.

The consequences of this disproportions led the settlers to secure properties, in the forms of land, cattle and even human beings as slaves. The effect has been, that most white descendants are able to inherit wealth from their ancestors. Wealth that was accumulated throughout centuries of slavery exploitation and cheap labor. This in turn has created a huge economic gap between minorities

and whites. This affluence facilitates access to prestigious institutions to whites. Thus perpetuating the plutocracy. How can we counterbalance this? Well, first of all we need to focus in the present by letting in the past rest in the pages of history, while forgetting a better future. We can do this by emphasizing higher education to our youth and by capitalizing on programs such as the "affirmative action." It requires commitment and discipline to achieve success. Our actions have consequences; they can be either positive or negative. It all depends on what kind of decisions we make.

One of the reasons minorities have been populating the prison system is the deterioration of family and religious values. The other culprit is illiteracy. An uneducated mind is vulnerable to radical indoctrination and recreational drug use. Without family values we become promiscuous showing a total lack of interest in marriage. When we lack fundamentals and principles we tend to gravitate toward anarchy. Lets break this vicious cycle by growing more conscious of what is really affecting our communities we can develop into a political force strong enough to deter politicians from pursuing those unfavorable policies that continue to affect our people.

"It is said that money corrupts," from this quotation we can infer that no government is immune to corruption for centuries humans had practices different forms of governments from monarchies to theocracies, dictatorships, juntas, democracies, plutocracies, none of these forms of governments has been able to stop corruption or injustice only the people united can put a halt to such practices it has been demonstrated in our history. It's our duty to guide today's youth they are responsible for tomorrow's generation. What's racism, it is a disease that affects our minds. It's "synny" Synonym is ignorance. Racism is capable of blinding the smartest man into believing that he is superior to others. Remember that it is by acknowledging our mistakes and foul that we tend to grow not only as persons but also as human beings.

ROYALE LEBLANC

It's always hard to read of the tremendous hardships our writers endure as children, but it's doubly hard when we know the writer personally. Beginning in our SF/YGC workshops and continuing through a period of employment in our office, we have known Royale LeBlanc for some years, and we have seen the struggle he is engaged in to overcome the circumstances of his life. Ironically, while he (like most) insists that he made his own choices and would make them again, we know that we cannot choose what we do not know. So, while he concludes that he would be just the same, whether he had a dad or not (or if he had not witnessed his father's brutal murder), we have to disagree. We know we are all what we've been exposed to, and what we know from what we see. Tragically, this does not let anyone off the hook for those choices — all of which carry consequences. It is those consequences that Royale is now enduring in his cell in the San Francisco County Jail.

Deep

As I sit in darkness with my pen and pad,
Reminiscing about all the struggles I've had,
It only gets deeper within time,
Racing thoughts that hit, and cause you to be mentally blind,
You cannot control the rage nor your fear,
As you mentally shake these thoughts your mind will not clear,
Thinking back to the time pops got shot,
All the brains and guts, his body dropped,
Slumped over with no emotion
Blaring sirens with lots of commotion,
You're mentally scarred for life,
By seeing someone claim your father's life,
Now you're growing up without a dad,
Trying to figure out why the world is so cold, yet so sad,
You walk the streets and see only pain,
People in agony, but remain the same,
So lost, so confused, nowhere to go,
Pain picking at your brain, and it's starting to show,
Back into the darkness with my pen and pad, and
Boom! It hits me in the face,
How much I passionately hate this place!

Going Insane

Deep thoughts caress my brain,
Some are thoughts of going insane,
How to keep my composure, and stay loyal to myself,
Keep hidden the things that were put on the shelf,
For no one to ever see, nor touch,
Things I care about so, so, so much,
My actions in the past cut my heart deep to the core,
To where my insides bled till they could bleed no more,
Only thing left are strains of pain,
And those same old thoughts of going insane...
Life lived in a deep abyss,
A very dark hole where no one can enter nor miss,
Darkness! I can't see,
Where his inevitable hole has taken me.
I don't know, but I want out,
So I scream at the top of my lungs, "I shout,"
It might not be nothing, but only time can tell,
When my pains and suffering will end, in this lifetime hell,
These are the things that I tried to refrain,
But it only seems things remain the same,
And that is these screwed-up thoughts of going insane...

My actions in the past
cut my heart deep to the core,
To where my insides bled
till they could bleed no more,

In This Dark Hole

The more that I sit in this dark hole the more I notice a lot about my life. One of the most messed up things that I can remember that's constantly on my mind is when my father was killed in front of me at the age of two years old. Growing up without a father, as many of you know, is very hard. There is a lot that comes along with a dad, and one of those things is guidance. A lot of us didn't have that. Maybe that's why we do some of the things we do. We can't live our lives not knowing about what could've, would've, or should've happened. I do know that if you stay focused on what you've got to do, you can do it.

It has struck me deep not having a father figure. The only father figure I've ever had was the streets. Most of the time it seemed as though I didn't have them either. I've only been blinded by gangs, drugs, and violence. But that has been a very big part of my life. How do I give that up I have yet to find out because I'm steady in the fix of the whole things. I don't know if it's because I like being in jail, or if it's that I'll feel like I was and I am being disloyal to the ones that I love and care about. Only one way to really find out, but I really refuse to do so. I can't stop gangbanging'... or is it more like I don't want to stop gangbanging?

It's a very hard task to overcome, but it's possible. I always ask what would my life be like if I had a dad. I most likely will be the same person because I choose to do what I do. But the message I'm trying to get across is that no matter, if you've got some type of guidance or not, you are still going to do you. Make the choice or it can cost you your life but it's up to you.

The only father figure I've ever had was the streets.

MATTHEW

It's always nice to hear from former Beat Within workshop participants because so often we get out or continue doing our time elsewhere without keeping our ties with people who have our best interest at heart. He's now writing from Rites Of Passage in Yerington, Nevada, and the poem he sent us is an incredible one. He writes from the experience of being a gangsta and in his letter to us he makes it known that he's not glorifying that type of lifestyle, but he is attempting to let others know what they're getting into. He's one of those ones who comes from a perspective of, "Do as I say, not as I do," and although we feel like there are more effective ways to go about doing things, we still appreciate the fact that he's reaching out to others with a good message. For those who are a part of this lifestyle, we know you'll feel what he's going through...

Threw My Eyes

Threw this gangsta's eyes he sees colors of death
The young inhaling killing toxins with a deep breath
This gangsta done seen it all and experienced the worse
Always dreaming of a different scenery and a lift of this curse
But some don't see the reality of a gang banger's life
The constant watch of your body avoiding the gun and knife
Sometime killings get unrecognized because of class
But most of the time their gang members that life's have pass
Nowadays the young are recruited before they could think
Left with no choices but a colored rag and a drink
Society itself feeds to us gang bangers as bait
Luring us into it's soon ending without time to wait
But really,
gang bangers don't see the bad in their choices
It's just ignored with all the hurt and helpful voices.

Jeopardy To Safety

Verse One:

Don't let him take advantage of you, abusing you, and using you.
Aloof yourself from the agony, wake up girl, there's no destiny.
You deserve a man who can get you to smile, elation baby, go versatile. Your eradicating that savage one,
Put that sexy glow, back upon your face.

Chorus: 2x's repeat

You're descent girl (cut abuse out of your life)
You're descent girl (get some love in your life)

Verse Two:

You're too intelligent to be harmed, I'll comfort you,
You're safe in my arms.
Deformations erased from your presence, blur out the misled,
Girl stay intense.
Devote your connections with someone, likely to invigorate you.

Chorus: 2x's repeat

You're descent girl (cut abuse out of your life)
You're descent girl (get some love in your life)

DANIEL ROWE

We're always glad to have Daniel in our pages because he shares a heart that mainly bleeds for others. And he makes that fact evident this week. He first writes a short story about a man determined to make it. And after the short story, he briefly talks about the moral for our readers as if to say, I wrote this particularly for you and if the character in the story can do it, so can you. This is a true testament to his compassionate heart. Then he writes a poem to a woman who's obviously going through her share of troubles and offers her a shoulder to lean on. We're sure he has no ulterior motives in mind because again, he has a very compassionate heart. Daniel Rowe writes from Corcoran State Prison in Corcoran, CA.



Something's Missing

Scene 1:

Location: Exterior, San Bernardino County in California. A young Caucasian male around 19 years old walks down the streets wondering what is he going to do with his life. He couldn't read nor write because he had apathy in school and education. He looked at a sign and couldn't read, so he asked someone.

Young Caucasian Male: Excuse me dude, could you tell me what that sign said?

Respondent: Sure. It said, "Help wanted in sales"

Young Caucasian Male: Thank you a lot.

The Caucasian man walks inside the building to ask for a job spot. Only thing is that he didn't understand filling out an application. He went in to see the boss.

Boss: Hello, have a seat sir.

Young man sits in a chair in front of the boss's desk.

Boss: Sir, do you have any experience in selling? Or do you have confidence that you can do the job?

Young man: To be honest sir, I can do the job for sure, but I have a problem with reading and writing.

Boss: Well, I'm sorry but you have to be able to write and read for a job like this. I abhor to turn you down, but business, it's serious. I encourage you though to get that education (smile) you take care. The young man feels sorry and upset that he didn't get his ed. He had seen that if you want a good interesting job and succeed in life and get by, that you have to absorb as much knowledge as possible. So he started studying as he checked himself into a continuation school.

Scene 2:

Location: Interior, San Bernardino County, the young man sits in class with his head buried in a book, and taking notes on his lesson. Yes, he had learned to read and write. He wanted to share his knowledge that he had picked up with everyone. He stands in front of the class.

Young man: I first want to thank the teacher for feeding me all the education that was brought to the table in this classroom.

The youngster read and shard a few pieces that he put together educationally down on paper, that you can write an essay. They were beautiful pieces. Time, like months past by, and the young man graduated. He went back to the same place, for the same job. He's back in the boss's office.

Boss: You're back huh?

Young man: Yes sir

Boss: What can I do for you?

Young man: Well sir, I just graduated from continuation school. I got my education. So now I come back for the job. Boss: Sir, I'm gonna have you fill out an application and see what you have to bring to this business. I'll look you up as planned.

Young man: Thank you for your time, and opportunity.

Two days later, the young man got a call saying that he got the job. He was happy, and started work the next day.

See, no matter who you are, what you are, or where you came from, you can accomplish something. But you have to want it, and stay at it, and never abdicate your ambition. This young man went years without a chance because he chose that he didn't want nothing. But when he seen the world for himself and grew up, he seen that it wasn't too easy, so he got himself straight and educated. It's not easy in an abstain mindset. I encourage all those young men and women growing up today to go to school, devote to education and vocation. Each one, reach one, to teach one. Knowledge is the key.

THE PRINCE

We just wanted to start off by saying that we can't put you where you used to be in the publication, when you were a standout writer over in Alameda County Juvenile Hall, because The Beat Within is for those who are 'within' workshops. Those who are 'without' workshops are in The Beat Without (the back section). We apologize but that's just how our process goes. But back to the real introduction. He's writing from Dewitt Nelson, a California Youth Authority Institution in Stockton, CA. And this week he sends a letter and three poems. The letter explains where his mind is at when he wrote this, and although he believes that he'll make it, we think he should have a back-up plan in case his music career doesn't flourish like he wants it to. It's always nice to have a back-up because then you don't have to rely on just one dream or goal. You have many other options to choose from. Well, thank you for writing so much about yourself for us. Hopefully, we'll hear from you again soon.

Open Your Eyes

I ask myself to ask my heart are you okay...
It tells my soul to feel in these tracks of its lost art
I who cry... shhh just because and I have tried
But given up on me who was self pity
These memories... this pain... I need love yes plenty
Who know my rain from these reflections
I'm so cold... I've been abandon once more
This pain is so familiar its so old
Back at it again
I ask myself to ask where and when
Is this love that's so precious
It's right where its been
But that's still my life hidden message.

Almost Out

It's almost a year since I wrote to The Beat Within... and yeah its because I'm in the Y... a when The Beat Within staff get this could you please put me in the front pages where I used be? (smile)

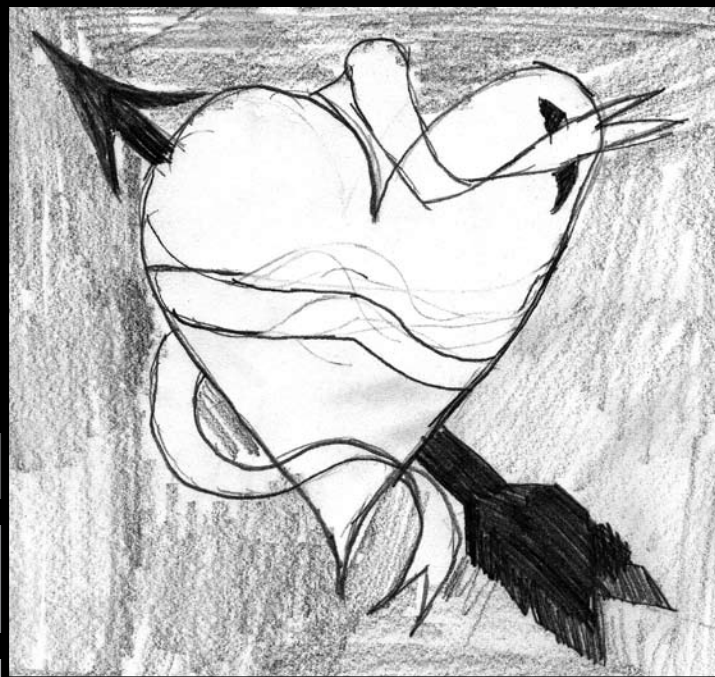
Anyways... I know a lot of people ain't tryin' to hear nothin' I'm talkin' about and I ain't trippin' 'cause I mean I'm just another person locked up... but trust what you are about to witness is always history...

Between life and understanding there's confusion... and we fail to realize our journey... what I mean by that is our insight of things... we look at things as if there's no reason to care for... don't take this the wrong way... but for instance yourself... I mean you wouldn't put yourself in the position you in if you cared about yourself... I can't talk I'm in the Y... but I realize that I want to live for a reason... not just to live and die with no kind of history or memory... I got 5 months to the house... and when I get out a lot of y'all no what's up... I'm gonna get rich... I mean... I'm not just runnin' to the music industry because it's easy money I got other goals and plans... but one often is to sing... make more beats and make money the right way... but I blame that I'ma make it in life... I know it I mean every bad decision has its consequence... and I'm tryin' to not just live and be the future I'm tryna live through these present days because a lot is goin' on in this world now... people are really dying... and just as easy as it is to live... and be born... you could be taken out this world and be forgotten I want to die and know that I left some history... not just kids... But my words... my books... my communication... my music... I mean something... and not just nothing... people are dying... and forgotten some how...and I do not want to be forgotten...

Anyways I'm really just on one... a for the people who remember me... I remember you... I'm gon' be out Oct 17 of this year... a month before I hit 17 on the 12th of November... and when I get out you gonna see me on TV. On them videos... talking big shhh... 'cause I told y'all I was gon' make it... there is nothing more important to me right more than myself... I say that because I never felt that way about myself... until I realize how important I was... I'm not gonna get out and find a female to live off until I come up. I could but I ain't... I'm gonna find my own way through... I know it ain't gonna be easy... but it never was hard... I just brought it on myself... being hellla naive... anyways I hope The Beat let y'all write me if so I'm at the Y in Stockton

Until Then

It's hard to heal what's in the inside,
The hands, have been heated, the legs, feet, face and arms...
But my heart has its same pain... the same feeling and yes the same form, same bleed, but different heart beat...
But from there I speak...
Everyday... different week... same changes but years and take time to blink
It touch me... yet again it abuse me
Love is the best cure... I wish it could overdose in me...
Touch by hope and hoped because I wish maybe eyes I look into distance
My dropped tears that mist
Upon my trembling hands where is the man in me...
I fall but stand just because I believe in me
It's so hard to heal the wounded... because the healer is also in pain...
Tell me where...
Tell me how...
Please love I need you now
Because there is where I'll stand.



Find Yourself

Looking in each face... realizing each pain and struggle...
But never seen mine... addicted to each breath... afraid of the part of mine...
Never did change the old ways they remain hidden in each shadow of my soul...
Wishing I could be forgiven
But how...I haven't forgave myself
And yes I feel so cold...
Runnin' deeper and deeper... so far I'm lost
I want my way back... but it's like my time has been sold
A lot has been said... but nothin' has been done shhh really I could've been dead
But I live 'cause I'm the only one
The only sun...
That burning deep inside me...
And maybe others
We as each others...
Has our own story...
"Besides me I'm tryna find"
I'll never go turn outside my straight line
Because I turn right just find about the truth of me and I.

My Struggles In Finding A Solution

Housed at Florida State Prison almost fifteen years, the main unit, and the last eleven years and almost three months have been spent in a 24-hour lock down one-man cell, close management unit and control units. My struggles in this unit has been on going, and each and every moment, I struggle within and without myself for a solution as how to pull myself up out of this hell hole.

I live in from day to day praying for a better way and the right solution, cause I am living in a very difficult situation, at one moment my mind be done found more than solution as how to get a better grip on myself and my situation. So I could humble myself and use my mind over these matters as learning how to over look the non-sense that would be brought my way. To think not just for myself, but also for all the foolish minds that's around me that does not know any better and they have a very low understanding about real things that mean so much in a struggling situation like this, cause a solution is always needed, cause I know in my heart that I could not keep on living like this, keeping myself stuck in a situation like this when time only gets harder for me.

When finding the right solution could make my time and living in prison so much easier. That's what finding a solution in a situation like this is all about.

JASON HUNTER What an analogy! And the sad thing is, this analogy is so destructive and horrific, yet it's so true and realistic. He talks about people who are incarcerated and personifies how animals are treated to compare how people who are incarcerated are treated. And sometimes animals are even treated better, for when they bark, they get fed, walked, and even get more affection than those who are locked away. It's a great piece sent to us from High Desert State Prison in Susanville, CA. We hope you'll appreciate it as we have. What are we saying? We know you will...

Behind The Wall

Prison is like an over crowded pound for dogs and strays
And believe me
That's how they treat us
If you keep a human being caged up like an animal
He will instinctively begin to act like one
Lashing out at any and everyone
Who comes near him
For lack of human contact
Within these walls is a world –
That exists within the world
No one should have to endure this,
But we all make mistakes,
And sadly enough
Some of those mistakes have landed us here
But the real question is –
When is enough
Truly enough?
For some their first trip became,
Or will become their last,
While for others this will
Or has become a repetitive thing
You see the prison system was built
Like a revolving door
For every ten who leave,
At least eight will return,
We are nothing but shares of stock
In the stock market,
And human cattle,
But even though we have a problem with authority,
We quickly become institutionalized,
And each day
When the door to our cage is opened,
We automatically walk out to the yard,
Or better yet –
To the pasture and begin to graze.

MICHAEL MCKINNEY This next writer has always had a lot of great things to say and this week is no different. He's going through some very painful times when the people who he has to deal with a day to day basis make it hard for him to live his life. He speaks about how much sensory deprivation goes on in Florida State Prison in Raiford, Florida (he writes to us from there). He also talks about how he's trying to find a solution so he can humble himself in a place where reputation could determine whether you survive or not. We are grateful to be able to, at the very least, extend an outlet for him to lean on. We apologize for not being able to do any more than that right now. Hopefully, you can continue to hold your head up, even in the face of such obstacles as the ones you will overcome.

Growing In The Midst Of Misery And Depression

I write about my growing in the midst of misery and depression from being housed up under these stressful condition and living around so many barbaric mindsets, so much sensory deprivation while being trapped in this close management control unit at Florida State Prison. My life has been through so many stages of falling and growing in the midst of so much craziness.

So many misery mindsets that be going out they way by all means necessary to pull me on they level of misery. And at times I would find myself falling into a state of depression a state of relapsing, and the old saying is misery loves company. And I had first hand experience at seeing how misery loves the same company. And how other miserable ones strive with all they might to make other convicts who live around them feel the same misery they feel and the same depression they feel and the condition that I have been living up under for years are very stressful.

DIEGO POET Here's another of those wonderful poems that we present with our apologies. This talented poet has waited far too long to see it published, and that's our bad. Calling himself the Diego Poet, he draws parallels between the barriers we put up to keep immigrants out, and the barriers he faces as a prisoner. The strength of this poem is in the strength of this poet – the ability to “look up” and find freedom! New to The Beat, this writer has his own website (diegopoet.com) where you can find other works of poetry and writing. The Diego Poet writes from Donovan Correctional Institution in San Diego, CA.

Look Up

They are making it harder, g
ente unable to cross la frontera
Triple fence, migra blocks, trying to get to the fields to
pick our crops
Looking up at the sky, massive flocks of birds,
Like celestial angels arching into cloud banks
God whispers in my ear, “Look up, Brother, look up!”
They are making it harder, triple fence razor wire
Electric, fourteen thousand volts,
too many, peligro they say
With their pepper spray eyes, guards all mad dogging
You stare, one false move, no warning shots
Get on the ground, handcuffed and shoved underground
But instead, I just look up in the sky
Fly majestic circles with my eyes
It is not enough to be here on the ground
I must fly above it and still be profound
Sunlight dapples in the blue openings
Light penetrates into our eyes,
walk beneath this painting
Look high above –
I am not suffering like the man would have
Look past the concertina wire, out beyond the fence
Way beyond the watchtower, out past the steel barrier
I will look up and write about how I feel
They can try and still not succeed...
When I look up, I'm freed

MONROE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY

As a great tribute to *The Beat Within* when we took a trip out to Rochester, N.Y. most of these next writers (between the ages of 16 and 21) read their pieces to us out loud. We heard missives, poems, raps, and most of all tales from across the country of virtually the same trials and tribulations we're going through out here in California. To see what their county jail wrote look in the front pages of *The Beat Within* and for more on our trip, check out the editor's note inside the cover. These young men and women (the women are at the end of their installment) were incredible. And the point person for all of this, Dale Davis executive director of The New York State Literary Center, was just as amazing. Here's her introduction to these wonderful pieces. Let's welcome them with open arms. These contributions are from the Monroe County Jail and the Monroe Correctional Facility in Monroe County, New York. The writing resulted from Arts, Literacy, and The Classroom Community, an Empire State Partnership between The New York State Literary Center, Dale Davis, Executive Director, and The Rochester City School District's Youth and Justice Programs, Margaret Porter, Administrator, with the collaboration of the Monroe County Sheriff's Office. The Empire State Partnership was made possible with public funds from The New York State Council on The Arts.

My Life

Daddy, why am hearing these gunshots in my ear?
Why am I still
living in fear of my life, my fate?
Will I get up in time
or is it too late?
For all those people you hurt,
I saw the blood running from their eyes.
I can hear their bloody murder cries.
I can't wait to get rid of these nightmares.
These aren't the only nightmares.
Daddy, you are still here.
Daddy, stop yelling and supporting your addiction,
Think about your kids and their predicament.
Now I'm locked-up, the tables are turned.
Are you helping me?
Are you even concerned?
I guess not, no money, no visits.
It has been months.
I knew you would pull this stunt.
From all the abuse and the pain,
to these depts knowing my name,
I must be thinking too hard sometimes.
I ask myself why did I do the crimes.
Now wearing greens like a little leprechaun
I can't wait to get up, my day at dawn.
Can I let bygones be bygones
and let my life move on?

-Brittany

To My Little Brother

I sit and wonder and ask myself why?
Why do I have all this pain inside?
Sometimes
I just sit and cry
thinking about all the shhh in my life.
My baby brother is gone.
I
feel
all
alone.
Growing up I was all on my own
Living in the streets,
I thought I was grown.
Guns, drugs, sex, thugs
were all I had, and I felt the love.
Rape, abuse, drugs, and the game,
somehow my life
will never be the same.
Now sitting here behind these steel doors
I ask God why did He do this?
Death was in my past,
I never thought I would last.
I'm about to be twenty-one,
and my life is moving so fast.
I have come to realize it is time to put the game in the past.
If I keep living in the streets,
my life
will be a thing of the past.
I have to wake up and realize this,
no more crying or considering why.

-Erica

Broken Families

It is hard to go on without any guidance.
This leads to violence
and drugs
because there is no one there to tell you right from
wrong.
Lack of schooling,
fathers in prison,
how do kids learn to make the right decisions?
Poverty,
innocent bystanders,
all the people who could have done something with
their lives,
society nowadays does nothing.
STDs, betrayal,
everything boils down to a lack of trust.
In the Roc there is not enough trust,
and that boils down to violence and broken families.

-Reggie

Trying To Make A Change

Darn life, it's what you make of it.
I chose the easy way,
money, women,
I lived it.
Now I sit here, and it's a lot better
than being six feet under.
That was the life I chose.

Now as I lie back and think,
I am tired of that life I chose.
My friends are no longer with me,
they are in
Heaven, Hell,
or doing life.

I have seen too much blood shed
for this lifestyle.
Who wants to live it?
I'm done,
I'm out of the game,
and I lived to write about it today.

Yes,
I'm locked up,
me,
I'm making the best of it.
It's a whacked up stop.
Life is precious.

-Ernesto

I Am

I am nobody,
a brother and unwed father.
I am a person who has dreams.

I am a Black male with no place to go.
I want to become a better person.
I want to make a living
and not do what I know.

-J

MONROE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY (CONT.)

What Do I Have To Say

I have to say
I am tired of being in jail,
tired of receiving mail,
tired of making bail.
I am tried of the closing cell.

I have to say
I am tired of broken hearts
and hurt feelings.

I have to say
I feel like I am trapped
in the system
and can't wait to get out.

I have to say
I am tired of greens and oranges
and whatever other colors.

I have to say
I am tired of listening
and being told when
and what not to do this and that and
this and that.

I have to say
the day I lost my baby
I wanted to leave everybody behind.
I have to say
my baby was my heart and soul.
Now I feel empty handed.

I have to say
the day the hospital called my house
telling me I had to come,
I knew something was wrong.

I have to say that things aren't the
same anymore.

There is a big difference now.
I have to say
my life is upside down
and is being thrown around
and not like a ball on the rebound.

My baby is in heaven.
I have to say that I feel pain
even when I don't think about what
happened that day,
December 20th,
powerful pain,
tears come down.
It is over.
I am so sorry.

As I go day by day
I wonder what is the way,
the way to stay away from here.
The days of my life in here are boring.
When I wake up in the morning,
I see another day
and pray dear Father show me the way
to freedom.
Give me wisdom.

I am tired of the phones
saying that number is restricted.
I'm tired of the food we eat,
the fake chicken patties, the sugar
water.

I am just telling the truth.
If anyone doesn't believe me, I am the
proof.
I am done talking through my teeth.
I can't wait to go home and be with my
family.

Things change.
I write this because
when I get out, no more streets for
me.

Things change,
I want to get my own house.
Things change,
I am going to get a job.
Things change
because one second people are here
and the next second they are dead.
Things change,
some people don't have a home
and a few weeks later they do.
Things change
because I am here now
and a month from now I will be home.
Things change,
I will not be on probation any more.
Things change,
I had a son.
He is gone.

Behind the walls of jail,
I am an inmate in greens.
I am a human being.
Behind the walls,
I feel like I am never getting out of
here.

Behind the walls,
it is stressful for me.
I am away from my family, my loved

ones.

Behind the walls of pain,
it's a shame
and I blame myself.
Behind the walls
it feels like flames that I cannot run or
catch.

I apologize,
I apologize
for leaving my loved ones behind.

I am a young Black man who has been
in the system too long.

I was searching.
I was searching.
I was searching for freedom,
but I never found where it was at.
It was lost.
Will I find it?

Somebody has to hear my story.
When I was fifteen I caught my first
charge.
This is fact, not an opinion.

My truth is
I will live life after I leave here.
I will live a good life.
My other truth is I miss my son a
whole lot.
I can't explain it.
My truth is stronger than this jail time
I am facing.
My truth is solid,
concrete, pavement, and steel mixed
together all into one.
My truth sometimes leaves my head
then comes back again like life after
death.
My truth is dangerous,
more dangerous than a hurricane, a
volcano, and a burning building.
This is my truth.

When I go home
I know I have to change some things,
like getting a job.

I am a young Black man from the
ghetto
trying to serve time
and do right
and stay strong out of jail.

-Rodney

For My Sister Ericka RIP

How does it feel to lose your sister?
When people ask me if I miss you,
I wish I could turn back the hands of time.
I never wanted any harm to come your way.
I wish I never had to live through that day.
I hate it that you died at such an early age.
I wish I could have you for a quick minute just to kiss
you
and to let you know
you have my middle name in memory.
Thinking about how you died kills me.

-Raheem

Things change,
I want to get my own house.

Things change,
I am going to get a job.
Things change

MONROE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY (CONT.)

Stuck In The System

I'm stuck in the system.

Why am I a victim?

To this that I live,

it's not what it is.

I have to get myself free
because it's not me.

Can't you see

in the system is not where I want to be.

I've been in the system all my life so don't laugh.

This is what I got for choosing the wrong path.

It wouldn't have happened if I had listened to what my
mother said,

but I thought it would be cool to go the other way,
but I'm stuck in the system, and I have to do what I'm told.

I'm stuck in the system I have to break this hold.

Ended up in the system from my own plan,
living life too early thinking I was my own man.

Stuck in the system, it's really killing me
cause I'm away from my family.

My baby cries herself to sleep asking where daddy's at.

I don't want to tell her so I lie and I'm mad at that.

Turn back the hands of time I wish I could
because being stuck in the system has landed me no good.

People say if you don't come to jail you're a sucker then.

Well I tell y'all you can have this pain and suffering.

I'm stuck in the system, and
the world is coming to an end very soon.

I'm stuck in the system, and
too much stuff is going on in the world today,

like people are dying left and right,
soldiers are killed overseas fighting for President Bush.

So many people are in jail or prison.

I'm stuck in the system, and
too many people are trying to be down
so they can feel cool.

All the violence needs to stop.

Too many families hurt
because their families members have been killed in the
streets

because they wanted to be down.

I wish everything would come to an end.

This is my dream everyday.

-Raheem



The Life Of An Orphan

The life of an orphan,
growing up without a mom or dad,
living with people I don't even know,
mobbing from home to home,
no blood family that I can relate to.

The life of an orphan,
not knowing if I am coming or going,
stressful moments that seem to boil.
I really need some prayer oil
to wash away all the pain,

to let go of all the hurt,
feels like an everlasting rain of pain that will not end,
like a hanger that will never bend,
an everlasting pain without a friend.

The life of an orphan,
and still I sit in the dark and cry,
and stare at a starry sky.

Feels like there's no tomorrow,
but tomorrow will bring better days.
And that's the life I'm living in,

The life of an orphan.

-Demonic

Why?

Why can't I be free?

Why with over fifty people

am I the only one who can't sleep?

My thoughts are real deep,
but when I am in jail I cannot focus.

I ask myself
why when the jail doors open
can't I focus?

I am hoping to live another day.

Why, when I got mad,
did I pick up a weapon
instead of walking away?

Why is violence so popular in the city of Rochester?

Too many people die,
So many who died were my family or friends?

Why do people like to see people in pain?
Why do people want to see innocent people
cry for their lives?

Why is this world all about violence?
Is it worth it?

I am hoping to live another day.

-Casey

MONROE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY (CONT.)

Unanswered Questions

(Chorus 2x)

Why are our Black men killing themselves?
 Could it be because they aren't feeling themselves?
 Why must all deaths come from beefs?
 Why doesn't anybody know anything about peace?
 And I'm not talking peace on your side.
 I mean the peace that comes from an equal state of mind.
 Answer that!

(Verse 1)

Why around here nowadays do people die younger and
 younger,
 but across the sea in Africa they die of hunger?
 Honestly I'd rather have that
 than for crimes that continue to be Black on Black.
 God bless to the dead and the gone,
 why when I think about it, I drop my head and I mourn.

Why do people walk with a gun and knife?
 Why won't somebody teach them that it's wrong
 just to end that life?

Why can't we just stop this strife?
 Why do my kids have to be born in this life?
 These are questions that have no answers.
 Why can't we get any jobs?
 Why can't we meet their standards?
 Why everyday do we lose another?
 Why did my baby's mom have to lose her brother?
 Why must everybody's life be full of sorrow?
 Why isn't anybody promised tomorrow?

(Chorus 2x)

Why our Black men killing themselves?
 Could it be because they aren't feeling themselves?
 Why must all deaths come from beefs?
 Why doesn't anybody know anything about peace?
 And I'm not talking peace on your side.
 I mean the peace that comes from an equal state of mind.
 Answer that!

(Verse 2)

This is why just like Jadakiss,
 killing, why won't somebody let them know we aren't
 made for this?
 Why don't they know just what life is worth?
 Why does it continue, is this some kind of curse?
 Why must it be over the littlest shhh?
 Raise your hand if you are feeling this?
 Mama said back then they used to square up to end the
 beefs.
 Now it's a forty-five and a nine tearing up the streets.
 Did it used to be paradise but now it's like we are living in
 hell?
 Some people would be safer if they lived in jail.
 Why with life, why can't we get away?
 Why do I feel like I have to live up in a way?
 Why is our world full of violence and drugs?
 And why does everybody with a gun in their hands feel
 like thugs?
 Why is this message always demonstrated in the media.
 Show some support if you feel me because I'm needing
 you.

-Raheem

I sit and wonder

why everything is such a mess.

At least my baby's father is great

and holds on tough.

Without My Son

I got caught with some people
 and mistakes in the streets.
 I am now sitting here trying to figure out why.
 I'm a young girl
 just trying to raise a son who is one,
 trying to get my life straight.

Why me?

Why?

Help.

Help, I cry out.

Why did they do this to me?

I don't get it.

Help.

Really, why?

I still sit and cry.

I am just a girl, a mom
 who is trying to move on.

Why?

Why did they put me away?

My life today is crazy.
 I'm trying to make it real
 and still I get abused and used.
 I am only twenty with only a son.
 I was out there trying
 until I got caught up in a mess.

I sit and wonder
 why everything is such a mess.
 At least my baby's father is great
 and holds on tough.

I pray I get out soon to hold my baby boy
 and never let him go.

My life, my shame, who is to know.
 I am just a girl.
 I just really don't know what's up.
 I know I am trapped in a box.
 Why?

I cry.

It doesn't make sense.

The game, the blame,

now I sit in shame.

My son, my life,

I cry and wonder why.

My son is hurt.

I want to make it bright for him.

I can't always be an angel,
 but if I do what's right will I ever be that cover girl baby
 my mother always wanted?
 I am only twenty
 with one little one who is my angel.
 I want to be the best I can be for him.
 Now I am in a bit of a jam,
 held for a mistake,
 so long without my son.

-Nicole

Why don't they know just what life is worth?

Why does it continue, is this some kind of curse?

MONROE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY (CONT.)

Thoughts Behind A Metal Gate

Full of inspiration,
I could lead horses to water,
rich anticipation,
guided with encouragement.
My face crumbles from the stress and the pain,
the logic of me becoming great,
redirecting my fame.
I watched my dreams turn to trash.
Thoughts burn deeper.
I asked myself
a scholar, Pope, or teacher,
coward, ghost, or reaper.
A young rich soldier kicks back near Corsica
styling and blowing reefer.
It is hard to look through the eyes of a young man
fighting scarfed, pride, to the guns blame.
This is real talk.
These are just thoughts behind a metal gate
and a lesson taught is chalk behind that yellow tape.
-Chasten

Locked Up

Being locked up is crazy and stressful,
the things you go through before your sentenced,
like people talking about their bids,
and fights
and everything.
The other crazy thing
is the way you can be treated any way
and be talked to any way.
I tell myself
I put myself in this predicament,
and that's one of the stressful things about this
being a grown man and having other people tell me
what to do.
Another stressful thing
is missing a lot of things
like family,
new born babies,
a good opportunity to get me somewhere,
like having the opportunity to do something good
and I'm not there to take it,
or I was there and I didn't take it.
It's crazy, society involves bad things, bad people,
and I am not doing anything positive with myself or my
family.
Jail takes the place of my life,
and that's what's so stressful and crazy.

Being locked up
I think about all the things I want to achieve.
I think about all the positive and negative things
I ever did.
I think about increasing the positive
and decreasing the negative.
I think about my family
and what I am missing while I am locked up.
I am not there for my kids,
and I know my child needs me at all times.
I think about the days and the nights I am not there
and what goes on
and I am not there to tell him what to do.

Being locked up
I think about poverty
and the killings
and people coming to jail on drug charges.

Jail is time for me to think
about how not to come back.
-Reggie

I Don't Dream At All

I don't dream at all.
Whatever comes my way, comes my way.

I don't use my imagination for good things.
I don't have good things on my mind.
I think about money,
but it doesn't go anywhere.

I don't dream at all.
I don't have dreams because I am in jail.

I can't talk about how I feel because people don't care.
People don't care because
I am in jail.

People think I am ignorant,
and that once I come to jail
I'll keep coming back.
I don't know if that's true.

I don't dream at all.

I never saw any use in school
because none of my friends have ever finished school
anyway.

If I did finish school,
would it change anything?
I would still be Earvin.
Earvin is the type of person
who has no expectations.

I don't dream at all.
-Earvin

I can't talk about how I feel because people don't care.

People don't care because

I am in jail.

Dear Baby

Dear Baby,
Since the first time I met you
I have loved you,
and I always will.
You brought me close to you in a way I thought would
never happen.
You made me find myself,
and made me look back on my life
to see the things I was doing were wrong.

I am sorry that I hurt you when I came to jail
because I said I would never leave you alone.
Now I am in jail doing eight months,
and you not knowing where I was for about two weeks.

Damn, why did I have to be stupid and not listen to you
when you told me to stay out of trouble.
Now I am stuck behind these walls
saying I miss you.
I wake up and look at Black men and the police all day.
Damn, Baby
I promise you when I come home
I am going to change my ways
and be with you for the rest of my days.
-Earvin

The Bible

The Bible is your teacher,
It will guide you through your life,
It will pave your way to heaven
And teach you wrong from right.

It will light the path your walking,
Feel you, to help you grow,
Its promise, can never be broken,
Its truth, you'll want to know.

It will answer all your questions,
When you knock open its door
Your heart will feel its spirit,
It will leave you wanting more.

It's the way to your salvation,
Trust it, read it, and believe,
Have faith in the bible, it's the word of God,
For the Bible is all you need.

Hear My Voice

I'm calling you
I've made my choice
Listen to me
Hear my voice.

I was lost,
I walked alone,
There was no light
To guide me home.

I read your word
It eased my pain,
I found through you,
I've much to gain.

I did not know
But now I do,
I must give
My heart to you.

I Pledge To Jesus

I pledge to Jesus,
Of everlasting life
My confession of sin,
To the one true light.

And in his name,
I will ask as I pray,
To guide my heart,
Till the judgment day.

I will keep my faith,
And say my Amens,
Believe in his word
That he will come again.

Then upon his return,
When I'm raised from the grave,
I will meet him in heaven,
As one who was saved.

**Blessed are you,
Who live not for sin,
When you choose to repent
Your heart lets me in.**

Blessed Are You

Blessed are you,
Who ask to be saved
Look to the cross,
Your debt, I have paid.

Blessed are you
Who are spreading my word
Turn then to god
For my truth to be heard.

Blessed are you,
Who live not for sin,
When you choose to repent
Your heart lets me in.

Blessed are you,
Who kneel down and pray,
For life to begin,
I am the way.

WILLIAM BILLINGTON

We are being blessed from afar as this next writer is writing from the Cheshire Correctional Institution in Cheshire, Connecticut. He writes mainly about his belief in God and how that has brought beauty in his life. And although he's mainly speaking about Christianity, we know that a higher power, regardless who or what it is, can offer hope in a place that attempts to snatch our faith from us. He's using his higher power to the fullest and when it's used in this way we're happy for that. However, a lot of us are cynical about people finding God while incarcerated because they use it for strictly incarceration and then when they're free, they forget all about the higher power they were pleading with while in jail. But from what we hear from this next writer, his dedication runs deep. We hope he continues to shed light on us because nowadays times are so dark.

At The Cross

At the cross you'll find forgiveness
Your sins are yours no more,
Believe in the name of Jesus,
He's the way, the light, the door.

The cross is filled with peace and love,
Through faith it fills the heart
It's also filled with strength and hope
And it sets the righteous apart.

The cross is a gift of salvation,
It's a free gift received through God's son,
Once you believe and accept him,
In Christ you're united as one.

If you feel you may be falling
And you don't want to end up lost
You'll find all you need to save you
When you're standing at the cross.

Treasure Chest From Heaven

There's a treasure chest from heaven,
And its filled with words like love,
There's words of comfort, words of faith.
And the all come from God above.

One by one god placed inside,
Words that will help us grow,
There's words to teach us right from wrong,
And to guide us where ever we go.
You'll also find within this chest,
Words of peace and hope,
There's words to help one understand,
And words to help on cope.

All the words we will ever need,
God placed within this chest.
You only have to just look inside,
And you heart it will do the rest.

He Painted It Complete

From high on a mountain,
Overlooking the land,
I can see the green valleys,
A color in God's plan.

There's blue sky above me,
White clouds drifting by,
A bright yellow sun,
Shining down from the sky.

There's orange in a rainbow,
There's color everywhere,
On the distant horizon,
Purple mountains appear.

There's red in a rose,
Some roses are pink,
The earth was God's canvas
He painted it complete.

Why do people walk with a gun and knife?
Why won't somebody teach them that it's wrong
just to end that life?
Why can't we just stop this strife?
Why do my kids have to be born in this life?
These are questions that have no answers.
Why can't we get any jobs?
Why can't we meet their standards?
Why everyday do we lose another?
Why did my baby's mom have to lose her brother?
Why must everybody's life be full of sorrow?
Why isn't anybody promised tomorrow?

read the rest of Raheem's BWO piece on page 61

